Title: The use of sacred texts as tools to enhance social research interviews

Name Maged Sobhy Mokhtar Zakher

The Use of Sacred Texts as Tools to Enhance Social Research Interviews

Maged Sobhy Mokhtar Zakher

A thesis submitted to the University of Bedfordshire, in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

University of Bedfordshire

March 2018

Author's Declaration

I, Maged Sobhy Mokhtar Zakher, declare that this thesis and the work presented in it are my own and has been generated by me as the result of my own original research.

[The Use of Sacred Texts as Tools to Enhance Social Research Interviews]

I confirm that:

1. This work was done wholly while in candidature for a research degree at this University;

2. Where I have cited the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;

3. Where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;

4. I have acknowledged all main sources of help;

5. Parts of this work have been presented at academic conferences as indicated in List of Outputs.

Name of candidate: Maged Sobhy Mokhtar Zakher

Signature: **Maged Zakher**

Date: 19 March 2018

Abstract

Background – Enhanced social research interviews seek to engage interviewees in extended conversation-like dialogues where they are empowered to produce output by discussing themes of relevance to them. Photos, videos, vignettes and other enhancing tools have been used before in social sciences research interviews to contextualise the interview interaction. **Initial Assumption** – Sacred texts (such as excerpts from the Bible and the Quran) enjoy some features that make them potential tools to enhance research interviews. This study set out to answer the Research Question: 'What are the benefits and challenges of using sacred texts as tools to enhance social research interviews?' **Methodology** – Selected Biblical and Quranic verses were used in three sets each, to start social discussions with fifteen Christian and thirteen Muslim participants, respectively, in semi-structured interviews. **Findings** – The findings of this empirical study show that using sacred texts was perceived favourably by the participants, enhanced the dynamics of the interviews and provided a platform to produce data that are rich, varied and nuanced. **Conclusion** – This research points out the usefulness of sacred texts – as enhancing tools – when used in social research interviews to produce natural conversations that, in turn, lead to rich, nuanced data. This suggests that sacred texts can be added to the qualitative research interview-enhancing toolbox especially with exploratory studies that are open for emerging themes during interview settings. Research areas where sacred texts can be used in interviews include: ethics, social relations, gender roles, psychology, moral choices, cultural studies and spirituality, among other social sciences disciplines. Researchers as well as participants will be expected to have a degree of familiarity with the sacred book or texts to make both interviewers and interviewees interested enough in discussing it in an open and respectful setting.

Dedication

To Mum,

who was the first to teach me the love of God,

the appreciation of music,

and the pursuit of knowledge.

I dedicate this work to you, Mama!

Acknowledgments

I am indebted to a great supervisory team with which I have been fortunate to work. I would like to thank Dr Vladimir Žegarac not only for his academic support but also for making my PhD journey exceptionally pleasant. The intellectually stimulating discussions we had and the support you have given have both improved my thinking and increased my interest in pragmatics. You have taught me that it is possible to be knowledgeable and also kind; thanks, Vlad!

Dr Markus Haag has shown dedication and attention to detail without which my work would not be at the level it is. Markus, your extensive experience and the long hours we have spent discussing my project (all with a unique sense of humour!) have helped me shape my thinking in this project; a big Thank You!

I would also like to extend my thanks to Dr Milka Ivanova who has always shown her interest in my project and offered encouragement and support. Your comprehensive feedback and readings recommendations have positively influenced the outcome of this study; so thanks a lot, Milka!

Dr Barbara Czarnecka, you have given me confidence in my work, and you have also drawn my attention to some new angles; this has helped me clarify my arguments in more than one area in this work; thanks a lot, Barbara!

If it had not been for the extensive discussions and bouncing off of ideas with Dr Hoda Wassif, this work would not be at the stage it is at now. I appreciate your support and encouragement since this project was only an initial assumption. Thanks, Hoda, for the intriguing conversations, the long phone calls, and the tens of cups of coffee!

I am grateful for the support of Tricia Smart whom I cannot thank enough for her encouragement. Tricia, you have shown dedication and professionalism in all you do, and

from you I have learned how to think critically and listen to other ideas. If I am in academia, it is thanks to you!

I would like to extend my thanks to Michelle Miskelly and Caroline Aird of the Research Graduate School for their administrative support, Dr Peter Norrington for his support with proofreading, and all my research participants for the precious time they gave me.

My heartfelt gratitude is to my friends and family who were (most of the time) interested to ask how I was doing and more importantly what I was doing! I am thankful for having you all in my life.

List of Outputs

Zakher, M. (2015) ‘Relevance Theory and making a case for the use of sacred texts in cultural research’. Relevance Round Table Meeting 4, Institute of English Studies, Jagiellonian University, Kraków, Poland, 25 September.

Zakher, M., Žegarac, V. and Ivanova, M. (2015) ‘The use of sacred texts in understanding selected cultural aspects of the Egyptian and British cultures – a pilot study’, Contemporary Approaches in Training & Education for Cross-Cultural Competence: *potentials, challenges and its limits*, SIETAR Austria/IACCM Conference, Vienna University of Economics and Business, Vienna, Austria, 1 to 3 October. Available at: http://iaccm2015.sietar.at/proceedings/ACADpaper_IACCM2015_Zakher.pdf (Accessed: 25 July 2017)

Table of Contents

List of Figures

Chapter 1 Introduction

The study presented in this thesis explores the benefits and challenges of using sacred texts as tools to enhance social research interview dynamics and content. The literature is replete with different methods and enhancing techniques used in the social sciences with the aim of gathering data that are rich, deep and meaningful to the researcher's purposes. Sacred texts enjoy some features that make them, at least from a theoretical viewpoint, potential candidates for enhancing tools in social research interviews. The aim of this study has been to examine and explore such an initial assumption: Sacred texts have some features that make them promising enhancing tools in social sciences interviews. Since such an assumption has not been investigated before, this study embarked on "researching the research method", to use Helen Kara's (2015) words, or more accurately to research the interview-enhancing technique of using sacred texts as tools in one-to-one social research interviews.

In order to research the enhancing technique, the need for an empirical piece of research was imminent. Therefore, one-to-two-sentence-long excerpts from two sacred books (the Bible and the Quran) were selected and used as prompts in interviews, and the excerpts revolved around three main social issues. The data were analysed for the dynamics of the interviews and also for the nature of the content, and a discussion on the benefits and challenges of such a potentially-enhancing technique followed. While the content of the interviews is also analysed, this is done for the purpose of answering the Research Question: What are the benefits and challenges of using sacred texts as tools to enhance social research interviews? This means that the content of interviews in this study is analysed for the richness and variety of thematic material rather than for the very themes discussed. The empirical research in this study, therefore, aims to serve the purpose of

vehicle through which the potential of the proposed enhancing technique for use could be explored.

Rationale for investigating the use of sacred texts as tools to enhance social research interviews

The development of this new enhancing tool (a sacred-text interview prompt) has filled in a gap in the qualitative research interviews methodological literature. With the complexity of the social world, the need for a wide range of research tools is eminent as no one research method can 'capture the whole story' (Wellington and Szczerbinski, 2007: 13). This tool, whose potential use this work has set out to investigate, has proven worth adding to the qualitative research interview enhancing toolbox. The special features of sacred texts point out to their potential usefulness as prompts and tools to sustain a social conversation in a research dialogue that mimics naturally occurring verbal interactions. Moreover, they offer some interview-enhancing features (as evident in the data in this work) that may be lacking in other tools used in social research interviews, such as photos, maps, videos, and Rorschach's techniques among others.

The usefulness of sacred texts as tools to enhance social research interviews provides some solutions to otherwise challenging situations in qualitative research, such as interviewing participants from different cultural backgrounds, venturing into new research spheres, establishing a common ground with the interviewees (Mishler, 1991; Holstein and Gubrium, 1995), or avoiding a Western bias (Wong and Poon, 2010; Gobo, 2011) and/or artificial settings in social research.

The ability of sacred texts to prompt and sustain a social discussion with interviewees who are given texts relevant to them to discuss, offers much potential in qualitative research that caters to the interviewees' (rather than the interviewer's) worlds. The empowerment of research participants, the relevance they see in the tool used, and the clear contextualisation of the research dialogue, all point out the strong potential that sacred texts carry in their

capacity as research interview enhancing tools. Such capacity had not been examined in an empirical piece of research prior to the study reported in this work. Therefore, this work has bridged a methodological gap in qualitative research interview literature through examining this potential both theoretically and empirically.

This work also provides a detailed 'recipe' for social researchers to use sacred texts as tools to enhance research interviews in relevant contexts. The practical details discussed in this study include the challenges as well as the benefits of using such texts in this capacity of prompting and sustaining social research interviews with participants who consider the texts relevant to their lives.

Background

Interviews are of the most common tools to gather data in qualitative research (Silverman, 2001; Hermanowicz, 2002; Yeo et al., 2014). They have been said to 'hold a prominent place among research methods in the social and behavioral sciences' (Mishler, 1991: vii), and considered to be 'probably the most widely employed method in qualitative research' (Bryman, 2016: 466) and 'the richest source of knowledge about people's understanding of themselves, and the life around them' (Wellington and Szczerbinski, 2007: 91). Hollway and Jefferson (2000: 10) maintain that 'face-to-face interviewing has become the most common type of qualitative research method used in order to find out about people's experiences in context', and Denzin (1978) believes that interviewing is a favourite tool of qualitative researchers. While semi-structured interviews have been the method of choice in some research, some other studies have investigated enhancing the traditional semi-structured interviews by using additional tools such as photos (Smith et al., 2012), vignettes (Barter and Renold, 1999; Jenkins et al., 2010), maps, collages, or other prompts to springboard natural and/or deep discussions in social research interview settings (Kara, 2015).

This research set out to examine the possibility of fruitfully using sacred texts in research interviews to enhance the process of data gathering as well as the content of the data.

What is an Enhanced Interview?

An enhanced interview is a one-to-one research interview setting where both interviewer and interviewee engage in what Rubin and Rubin (2012: 95) call an ‘extended conversation.’ The purpose of such a conversation is to explore in depth some topics and themes (from angles) of relevance to the interviewee. The ultimate goal of such a setting is to produce interview data that are varied and rich enough to allow for the appropriate data analysis approach(es) (such as thematic analysis, content analysis, discourse analysis, conversational analysis, etc.) according to the specific research aim.

While such a setting can (and often does) feature in conventional semi-structured in-depth interviews, an enhanced interview uses an enhancing tool, such as photos, videos, diaries (Alaszewski, 2006), arts, etc. (Kara, 2015) with the aim to anchor the dialogue in a contextualised and conversation-like environment.

So, in short; and for the purpose of this research, an enhanced interview aims at a flowing conversation that can produce rich and varied data, and, therefore, can be defined as an interviewee-centred interviewee-empowering dialogue contextualised in interviewee-relevant themes.

Justification for the Topic

Sacred texts, such as excerpts from the Bible and from the Quran, have some qualities that make them potential interview-enhancing tools. To the relevant followers of faith, sacred texts carry some authority and high level of relevance (informally, informativeness), and it could be presumed that subscribers to the text will find something they can discuss and relate to if asked to explain a verse or a section from their sacred book. Moreover, in the way they are worded, sacred texts do not suffer from some bias in the question designing stage since they are already in the public domain rather than designed by the researcher.

Personal Reflection

I have always been intrigued by the different ways religious texts can be interpreted by faith followers. I came to notice that in an intercultural communication class that I was studying when a heated debate revolved around some 'more respect' that certain cultures offer parents and grandparents in comparison with other cultures which were painted in a negative light. What was interesting is the reason given, namely: that those cultures apply what the religion says. Part of my enthusiasm to do this project was to see how the same texts can be interpreted slightly or considerably differently reflecting perhaps the reader's rather than the textual background.

Theoretical Underpinning

This research is built on some theories and conceptual frameworks that underpin the initial assumption of the possibility of using sacred texts as tools in social research interviews. The theories referred to are also used to explain the researcher's epistemology (how knowledge creation takes place) and his understanding of the social interaction in a social interview setting.

Relevance Theory (Sperber and Wilson, 2004) explains how communication in natural settings takes place and the expectations on the speaker's and hearer's sides. Sperber and Wilson maintain that natural conversations presume that speakers produce utterances of some informativeness (relevance) to the hearer to be worthwhile of his or her attention. The utterance is also to be relevant in a way that does not require too much mental processing effort (from the hearer) in return for some cognitive gain. Linking Relevance Theory to the use of sacred texts as tools in social research interviews is built upon the observation that sacred texts carry that potential of relevance to the faith followers, since in their perceived sacredness they have the ability to function as stimulus that is worthwhile of the attention of the believer, and also their relevance in this sense can justify the mental effort exerted by the faith follower to reach the meaning of the religious teaching which can provide the hearer with some cognitive gain.

Social Constructionism explains the author's understanding of social interactions, and it also presents the epistemological stance taken in this study. Linking Social Constructionism to the use of interviews to gather qualitative data is built upon the belief that the interviewer and interviewee can both engage in a discussion where they co-construct their reality in that setting using some discourse that shapes and is shaped by that subjective reality. Underpinned by Relativism, Social Constructionism does not maintain that there is one objective reality out there and that research is set out to 'discover' it. Rather, the building (or construction) of one-of-multiple-realities is the goal in an interview setting where not only the interviewee but also the interviewer will play a role in knowledge creation (Roulston et al., 2003).

Therefore, it is believed that an authentic social research interview setting can provide for such an environment where both interviewer and interviewee engage in a meaningful discussion that mimics an 'extended conversation' (Rubin and Rubin, 2012: 95).

Research Aim and Objectives

The empirical study in this research aims to examine this initial theoretical assumption: that sacred texts, if used with the relevant faith followers, can enhance the interview dynamics (process), leading to a flowing contextualised discussion, which in turn can lead to credible and rich data (content).

In order to achieve this aim, the following research objectives should be fulfilled:

1. Examine the interview dynamics (including the interviewer–interviewee relationship) where sacred texts are used to start and sustain a discussion.

2. Understand instances where the interviewee shows empowerment and ownership of the discussion.

3. Assess the richness, nuances, and variety of the data gathered in the interviews.

Empirical Inquiry – Methodology

Twenty-eight interviews were conducted with Muslim and Christian participants. The one-to-one semi-structured interviews lasted from 38 to 140 minutes (with an average of 83 minutes) and were anchored around three sets of one-or-two-sentence-long verses from the participant's sacred book (the Bible or the Quran). The notions represented in the three sets of verses revolve around the following social themes: doing good to others, attitudes towards parents, and self-worth. Printed and laminated, verses were introduced individually, and further questions followed from the initial answers given by the participants.

Findings

The data show that familiarity with the sacred book as a whole and with the specific verses used in the research played a role in empowering participants, which, in turn, led to rich interview content. All participants in this study expressed their comfort and enjoyment in talking about their personal beliefs while discussing texts they subscribed to, as sacred. Interviews showed coherence with participants using strategies to link to other parts of the interview (for example, through quoting other parts of the sacred teaching or referring to a relevant religious notion linked to the discussion). Interview data were rich in stories, real-life examples, and links to the interviewee's personal and/or professional areas of life. The interviews also featured some laughter and light-hearted comments from participants, which can give some confidence that the general atmosphere was favourable and pleasant, even with discussing texts of such sacredness. The participants acknowledged the influence of the interviewer and commented favourably on the need for interested researchers who listen and show respect to the interviewee's input, whether they share the same faith or when they are from a different (or no) faith background.

Contribution to Knowledge

The findings of this empirical research point out the usefulness of sacred texts – as enhancing tools – when used in social research interviews to produce natural conversations

that, in turn, lead to rich, nuanced data. Therefore, the contribution to knowledge is methodological in that the results of this study suggest that sacred texts can be added to the qualitative research interview-enhancing toolbox under certain conditions, in some research areas and with specific kinds of participants and researchers. For example, exploratory studies that are open for emerging themes during interview settings can benefit from the use of such a tool. Research areas where sacred texts can be used in interviews include: ethics, social relations, gender roles, psychology, moral choices, cultural studies and spirituality, among other social sciences disciplines. Moreover, researchers as well as participants will be expected to have a degree of familiarity with the sacred book to make both interviewers and interviewees interested enough in discussing it in an open and respectful setting.

1.1 Reflexivity

No one comes to research with no values at all (Davies and Dodd, 2002). Even the positivistic concept of having no value is a value in itself (Kara, 2015). Throughout the research process, some reflection on the author's stance, attitudes, and values and where he stands on certain issues will be detailed. While some milestones will include more reflection than others, *Personal Reflection* glimpses are included throughout the next chapters with some personal thoughts typed *in italics* for the reader to have some access to the researcher's thinking process, moments of frustration, surprise and wonder. The use of the first-person style in those Personal Reflection glimpses is meant to clearly provide the reader with the author's personal voice.

The conventional academic use of the third person to refer to the writer is mainly to keep the focus on the interviewees and to be aligned with the general attempt to conduct social research interviews anchored around the interviewees' relevant texts. It is, however, not to be taken to mean the author is not part of this inquiry; it is the total opposite as will be clear in the data and discussion where the role of the interviewer is considered in detail.

Miles and Huberman (1994) maintain that one way of ensuring more confirmability of the research findings (i.e. more objectivity in the positivistic and casual sense of the word) is to make sure that the researcher is aware of and clear about their predispositions. Reflexivity will not be limited to the author's background, attitudes, beliefs, initial observations, etc. It will also include some unpredicted emotional responses to some of what the interviewees say or do not say (Ormston et al., 2014). The author kept a video diary with short clips of his impressions after each interview.

1.2 Thesis outline

This work starts by discussing the initial theoretical assumption that sacred texts have some qualities that make them potential enhancing tools in social research interviews.

Chapter 2 is a thematic literature review discussing notions and themes related to this assumption. It starts by examining the enhancement tools in use in the social sciences interviews; it then presents an argument in favour of adding the description of individuals' religious affiliation to the social sciences inquiries based on their self-identification.

The chapter then continues to discuss some challenges in social studies inquiries and moves on to discuss Relevance Theory and its connections with communication in natural settings. A particular attention is given to the assumptions of Relevance Theory and the qualities of sacred texts as prompts in conversation-like interviews. Social Constructionism is then presented as both the author's understanding of the social world and as the epistemology of this study.

A discussion on the high-quality interviews follows and some criteria are put forward to look for in the data. The chapter concludes with a summary of the qualities of sacred texts that make them potential interview-enhancing tools and a summary of the theoretical assumptions supporting their use in this capacity. The end of the chapter presents the need to empirically examine such a theoretical assumption in a social study.

Chapter 3 presents the methodology with the details of the research paradigm, the research design, the population and sampling as well as the specific choices made for this empirical study. The selection of the sacred excerpts, the ethics of the research and the interview format are presented in detail. The data analysis plan is put forward in preparation for the following chapter that presents the data.

Chapters 4 and 5 include the results and discussion of this empirical study. Chapter 4 starts by detailing the findings of this empirical study giving a preliminary commentary on the observations of the data. The data are thematically analysed and presented in three main categories: the content of the data (presenting the nature of the thematic materials found in the data), the dynamics of the interviews (presenting the observations on the techniques used by interviewees interacting in the interview setting), and the inter-actants (the identities of and interactions between the interviewer and interviewee in a sacred-text-based interview setting). Chapter 5 follows on to categorise the themes discussed in detail in Chapter 4 and presents an answer to the Research Question. It brings in the literature reviewed and the data gathered in the empirical study into a discussion about the possibility of the fruitful use of sacred texts to enhance social research interviews. This includes both the benefits and challenges based on the literature and the empirical data.

Chapter 6 presents some specific examples of research that can benefit from using sacred texts. It also presents recommendations for the future use of sacred texts as tools to enhance social research interviews. The recommendations include recommendations for the interviewer, the research design and the interview process. The chapter also discusses some limitations of this study and moves forward to suggest some possible future research angles to build on this study.

Chapter 7 concludes this work recapping the main milestones and themes, and it presents this study's methodological contribution to knowledge in social sciences research.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

Chapter Outline

This chapter presents the different angles – discussed in the literature – leading to the theoretical assumption that sacred texts (such as one-or-two-sentence-long verses taken from the Bible or the Quran) can be fruitfully used to enhance social research interview dynamics leading to rich data.

The literature review process followed a thematic review of the literature (Kaniki, 2006: 21) relevant to the notions of this inquiry and roughly mapped against the research objectives with some overlap. This covers specifically: the themes of prompts and enhancing tools used in social research interviews (Research Objectives (RO) 1 and 2), challenges in interviews (ROs 2 and 3), how communication in casual conversations takes place (ROs 1 and 2), the criteria of high-quality interviews (ROs 1 and 3), and the features that make sacred texts potential interview-enhancing tools when used in social sciences research (ROs 2 and 3).

This study is situated in the qualitative research interviewing literature with a special focus on the use of innovative tools to enhance the dynamics and quality of social research interviews. Therefore, the thematic review of the literature focuses on the following themes: enhancing tools used in research interviews (section 2.1), recruiting participants for research interviews based on their religious self-identification (section 2.2) and the challenge of asking the 'right' questions in social research (section 2.3). Moreover, it also focusses on elements in relation to the interview setting, such as the research interview as a communicative setting (section 2.4), the research interview as a socially constructed event (section 2.5) and the research interview as a site to produce high quality data (section 2.6).

The chapter starts by discussing some examples from the literature where enhancing tools and prompts were used in social research interviews to increase the quality of the data

and/or add an element of creativity to the research interview. The argument is then advanced to suggest the appropriateness of describing and categorising individuals, for the purpose of research, along the lines of their self-professed religious beliefs rather than (or along with) their national identities.

The chapter then moves on to discuss some of the cultural and linguistic challenges facing social sciences researchers especially when researching (and mainly interviewing) participants from a different background or culture. The section also points out the advantages that sacred texts can have in this regard over other researcher-designed prompts/interview questions as far as asking the 'right' question(s) is concerned. A theoretical discussion of Relevance Theory (Sperber and Wilson, 2004) follows with a detailed presentation of the dynamics of communication and what speakers and hearers usually expect in natural conversations. Social Constructionism is then introduced and discussed from an interview-setting viewpoint establishing the importance of creating one's world through using language (as in discussing issues in interviews).

The chapter then moves on to discuss what can be expected in good-quality interviews based on the social sciences research literature (mainly with the focus on semi-structured in-depth interviews).

This is followed by a recap of the qualities of sacred texts that, based on the previous sections, make them potential interview-enhancing tools if used with the relevant faith followers in a one-to-one semi-structured interview setting (section 2.7). The chapter concludes with a summary of the theories and conceptual frameworks drawn upon in this study (section 2.8). Recapping the previously discussed notions of the potential that sacred texts have as interview-enhancing tools provides the rationale for the need for an empirical piece of research that can examine such an initial assumption, leading to the next chapter (Methodology) which details all the steps taken in the empirical study in this research.

2.1 Enhancing tools used in research interviews

Various methods and enhancing techniques have been reported in the literature on research interviews. Some of these enhancing techniques have been used with the aim to increase the depth or richness of interview data, add an element of creativity to a piece of research, or to empower participants to express themselves better, among other practical reasons. Examples of interview-enhancing prompts and techniques include: photo-elicitation (Harper, 2002; Smith et al., 2012), the use of proverbs (Weber et al., 1998), Rorschach's technique (Weiner, 2003), the use of videos taken by participants (Cherrington and Watson, 2010), maps, life stories, etc. (Kara, 2015).

Music, poetry, novels, pictures, common sayings, proverbs, and other authentic materials (which are materials not designed originally for research purposes) have been used in some interview studies. In what is described as arts-based research, a host of arts can be used in social sciences research to add a creative element to the study, among many other purposes. Helen Kara (2015: 6) mentions 'drawing, painting, collage, photography', among other things, and the topics investigated included a wide range of social issues. While these tools are usually used in the data gathering stage (i.e. in the interviews themselves), they can also be added to the research results presentation stage (as in ethnodrama format by Sangha et. al., 2012). Adding an arts-based element to research not only makes it more interesting to participants, but it can also serve other purposes such as to investigate areas of art or to emancipate some participants whose voices may otherwise not be presented in similar traditional research. Kara uses the expression enhanced interviews to refer to the idea of a traditional research method (interviews) being improved (enhanced) by another element (such as photos, collages, mapping, videos, etc.).

Enhanced interviews use some probes, prompts, or artefacts around which the interview can be conducted (Kara, 2015: 83). These visual or physical tools can be designed and/or brought in by the interviewer or can belong to the interviewee who is invited to (sometimes

make and) bring the items along to the interview (Rose, 2012). In the latter case, interviewees in some researches were invited to use a provided video camera to capture some moments of their daily routine, in research on work/life boundaries (Whiting, 2016). Here it can be seen that such a technique can help participants and interviewers access some moments in the participants' lives where it may be difficult for observation or traditional interviews to capture. In one example, one participant had a video clip of him in the morning still in his bed reflecting on his working day ahead (Whiting, 2016). In another work, participants were invited to take still photos of their homes and daily activities, and then they were invited to talk through these photos with an interviewer (Martin and Pilcher, 2015), and in another, some ballet dancers were asked to bring photos from their work to talk about them in interviews (Fitzgerald, 2016). Mask making was used in another initiative by Melissa Walker (2016) to use art therapy to help those who suffer from war trauma to talk about their feelings through talking about the masks they made. In another research, participants were given blank postcards and asked to draw things representing their national identity (Davies and Bourke, 2017). In all these examples, interviews seem to benefit from the innovative nature of the tool used and can result in a deeper and/or richer discussion that can sometimes revolve around or into themes chosen by the participants themselves due to the nature of the selectivity in the artefacts they bring to the interviews. It is worth noting here that in most natural communication situations, the setting is usually much richer in contextual cues and clues when compared with a standard non-enhanced interview; therefore, enhanced interviews seem to add some elements with the aim of mimicking more ordinary communication settings (Žegarac, 2017[1]).

2.1.1 Appropriateness of the tool

Kara (2015: 87) uses the term 'culturally appropriate methods' in her reference to some examples of 'transformative research frameworks'. She gives examples of 'storytelling, quilting and so on'. Powell (2010) who discussed the use of mapping in research also gives

[1] Žegarac, V. (2017) E-mail to Maged Zakher, 30 May.

a word of advice to consider the cultural differences in the perception and the use of maps in the cultures of the people interviewed. While culturally appropriate methods can usually be appropriate in only some cultures, this sheds some light on the need for appropriate neutral prompts if the research involves a comparative cross-cultural study (Davies and Bourke, 2017). In this case, the prompt needs to be appropriate to suit the individual culture(s) and at the same time to be neutral if people from more than one culture are to be interviewed.

Part of the appropriateness that Kara (2015) refers to can be linked to the relatability of the tool. A research tool or prompt needs to be relatable to the hearer (interviewee) in a similar way a naturally occurring utterance is (in day-to-day normal communication). Voluntary research participants (serving as hearers to the interviewer's questions) benefit the researcher/speaker by volunteering their time; they, therefore, need to be given something relatable to trigger their answers in the interview setting. This is not always the case, especially with some groups who, in Rubin and Rubin's (2012: 80) words 'spend a lot of time for someone else's benefit and get nothing out of it'. This relatability or what can be called 'resonance' (Sullivan and Rees, 2011: 32) is needed in interview prompts if richer data are to be gathered and if interviewees are to get something out of it. In their book *The Active Interview*, Holstein and Gubrium (1995) mention that it is important to consider how meaningful and appropriate the questions are as well as the ways they are asked in an interview setting. Topics chosen for research investigation should also be of some importance to the participants 'or else they probably won't want to be involved' (Rubin and Rubin, 2012: 47).

2.1.2 Appropriateness of the use of the tool in a research interview context

What the use of creative prompts in social research does not always explain or justify is the nature of the research setting. While drawings, maps, photography and other prompts can be culturally appropriate (by carrying some resonance to the individuals interviewed), they may not be appropriate when used in research. They may be culturally appropriate for certain settings or frames but not others. After all, appropriateness is not a static feature. For

example, one may be familiar with their photos or drawings only in that setting: looking at them, but using them in research may be artificial to the same participants. The familiarity with the object used or the cultural appropriateness thereof may not inherently automatically justify its use-in-research appropriateness or guarantee the smooth use of the same object in a research interview. As an interviewee, one may feel uncomfortable talking about their photos; they may feel uncomfortable talking about photos in general; they may think of it as artificial to talk about photos thinking that photos are there to be seen and not talked about, etc.

The strangeness of the use of some otherwise-familiar objects in research has been considered as positive by some researchers. Dawn Mannay (2010), for example, discusses a study where potential interviewees were asked to do one of the following: take photos of their environment, draw a map of where they live, or produce a collage of photos of significance to them. She then used these visual products as springboards in interviews. What's interesting is that Mannay (2010: 91) chose 'Making the Familiar Strange' as the title of her article with the suggestion that the familiar items used in a strange context could 'render' it 'more perceptible'. It could be that in making the familiar strange new knowledge and deeper insights can be triggered. Explaining one's photos of their environment would definitely be more challenging (and perhaps interesting) than responding to a straightforward question of how would you describe your environment? These nuances that Mannay mentions can be the result of the extra mental processing effort needed to marry the novel medium (a research interview) with the familiar prompt (photos of familiar surroundings). In Relevance Theory terms, Sperber and Wilson (2004) maintain that the optimal relevance of an utterance will justify a worthwhile effort where a hearer needs to think more or harder to uncover the utterance's meaning. The strangeness or unfamiliarity of the medium in the context of research may in fact result in accessing more relevant contexts yielding data that are more accurate/credible/valuable (or valid in the common sense of the word). In Rose's (2012: 306) words, when participants are asked to take photos and then come to talk about

them in an interview setting, ‘it gives them a distance from what they are usually immersed in and allows them to articulate thoughts and feelings that usually remain implicit.’

On the other hand, however, this may result in the opposite effect; people may find the strange still strange! They may opt out if they feel they cannot take photos or they may not be able to talk about photos. However, it is also worth noting that making the familiar strange may not necessarily prompt deeper outputs; it may prompt different outputs. This means that one, if interviewed about a photo he or she took, may feel obliged to give some sense-making comments on the photo. In having to do so, he or she may produce something that is totally or relatively artificial in an attempt to provide some intelligent answer. But supposing the making the familiar strange results in deeper data, be it via photos, diaries, or verses from a sacred book, the unfamiliar medium may prompt a context that would not have been otherwise prompted in a normal traditional interview setting or more importantly in everyday social interactions. Such is the concern that is referred to in some research literature as the ecological validity. The ecological validity is concerned with how real the results of a study are when compared with the participants ‘natural habitat’ (Cicourel, 1982: 15). Bryman (2016: 42) maintains that while the results of a social study can be valid (as far as measurement validity, internal validity and external validity are concerned), the results could lack the ecological validity if they produce ‘findings that … have little to do with what happens in people’s everyday lives’. He goes on to explain this giving the example of a well-designed questionnaire-based study that may still have ‘limited ecological validity’ because of the ‘unnaturalness of having to answer a questionnaire’. If the enhancing tool used in a research interview is too strange (or unnatural in Bryman’s terms), the contexts furnished in the interview and the consequent data may not represent the reality of the participant. It may, still, represent another reality (that of the interview setting); however, the researcher may not be ultimately interested in that side of artificial-setting reality.

Prompts and other ways to enhance interviews need to explain not only the items and artefacts and how familiar they are but also the use of these items in a natural conversation

or in that research interview setting and whether this too is (or can be made) familiar to the participant. The familiarity of the tool needs to be complemented by the familiarity of the context in which the tool can be used if genuine data (i.e. ecologically valid) are to be gathered. It is for sure a step forward if a familiar item or piece of art is used to enhance a research interview, but it is the use that brings about some data, not the item on its own. It also needs to cater for the participant 'affordances' to use the tool (Buckingham, 2009: 647) (to take photos, draw, build Lego blocks, etc.).

It is also worth noting that sometimes the mere fact that a prompt is used creatively in a research setting (instead of the traditional tell-me-about-this approach) may skew the data towards a more positive or negative (or simply different) side depending on the respondent's perception of the creativity of the tool. Participants feeling excited about an item (be it music, movie, map, etc.) in an interview setting may not give the same answers were they in a traditional setting or had they been exposed to the same technique of interviewing before, especially if such items were provided or made by the participant themself. This is not to say that the traditional interview is the yardstick by which other different techniques are to be measured; however, the question is always how a researcher can design a study so that the content constructed in an interview setting can reflect comfortably what the interviewee would say or do in their normal daily life. Mishler (1991: 121) maintains that 'the alienating impact of forms of representation that replace real contexts with artificial ones alert us investigators to the possibility that respondents may be affected similarly by research interviews that strip away natural contexts of meaning from both questions and responses.'

There will always be an element of selectivity in what one can say and in possibly painting oneself in a positive light when interviewed, but the argument here is that social research interview tools need to lend themselves to their fruitful use in a communicative way when they serve as part of an interview setting. This way, gathering data will be in a context similar to a naturally occurring interaction that a participant can have outside the interview setting in their 'natural habitat' (Cicourel, 1982: 15).

2.1.3 Photos as an example of non-word-based interview prompts

Photo-elicitation has been used as a technique in interviews for some social studies where participants are usually invited to take some photos and bring them to be discussed in an interview setting (Rose, 2012); however, this does not have to be the case; the photos can be taken by the researcher or found elsewhere and then used in the interviews. In his paper, Douglas Harper (2002) speaks of the benefits of using photos as prompts in in-depth interviews (when compared with words-only interviews). He suggests that the human brain seems to react differently to photos since 'the parts of the brain that process visual information are evolutionarily older than the parts that process verbal information. Thus images evoke deeper elements of human consciousness [than] do words' (2002: 13).

Another theme that Harper (2002) maintains is that photo-elicitation gives the authority to the interviewee because he or she can choose what to comment on, what to see in an image, whether or not to comment on something that was left out, etc. In this case the authority (or the 'expertise' in Rose's words (2012) as the interviewee is the one who took the photos) is not with the interviewer who, in other conventional interview settings, may have a list of questions requiring some answers. Whether photos are prepared by the researcher or even sometimes by the interviewees (as in Allen, 2012; Smith et al., 2012; Martin and Pilcher, 2015; Fitzgerald, 2016), the use of a non-word-based trigger is more likely to yield some depth in the interview. It may also lead the discussion to a direction more relevant to the interviewees, especially that some visual prompts can be more flexible than word-based questions. Here we can notice a shift from theme-based interviews (where the interviews revolve around topics) to prompt-based ones: rather than asking the interviewee to talk about a theme or a topic, they are prompted to talk about any theme that the prompt triggers. In this case, more freedom is given to the research participants as different individuals may see different things in the same photos.

Another interesting point that Harper (2002) makes in support of photo-elicitation is the possibility of photos to help bridge the gap between the researcher and the interviewee in an

otherwise more challenging situation in word-based interviews. The setting where both look at one photograph and try to co-construct some knowledge seems to Harper to enhance this gap-bridging. It could be the simple fact that something concrete (in the form of a photo in this case) is seen by both interviewer and interviewee during the research interview, and this can lift off some pressure. This externalised focus on an artefact seems to take the spotlight away from the interviewee, which can lead to a more relaxing setting (as opposed to a dialogue between two people with all the ideas thought to be inside their heads). Such a technique is used in educational settings (for example, in using realia in language classes, Richards and Rodgers, 2014) to enhance group discussions by, for example, giving each group (or each group member) an object to talk about, and in this case the situation is perceived to be less intimidating to shyer students. The same occurs with some exercises in what is known as Cultural Animation (Kelemen and Moffat, 2017) where each participant in a group selects one object from a box and then talks to the group about what the object represents within the frame of the discussion topic.

While photo-elicitation can dig deeper into some areas that are difficult to reach by text only and while they can lead to rich, complex and multi-layered talk (Rose, 2012), they may still run the risk of having some emotional strings to them. If the photos are taken by or of the interviewee or of his or her family, neighbourhood, house, school, etc. then some emotional ties may be there. This could make it difficult to navigate some moments in the interview if the discussion gets emotional. It can also make it difficult to avoid such directions if they seem too obvious to the interviewee.

Photos are also difficult to use in a comparative capacity (i.e. with other interviewees). If they belong to the interviewees then it becomes difficult to establish the equivalency; if they are chosen by the researcher, they will inevitably belong to certain background(s) but not necessarily others.

2.1.3.1 Rorschach's technique

One technique that has been used in psychoanalysis is Rorschach's technique. In this technique the interviewee is not given word-based questions or even photographs but only visual patterns on cards (Weiner, 2003). The patterns do not represent anything in themselves. They look like inkblots on paper, taking shapes that could be 'read' differently. It is from the interviewee's 'reading' of the pattern that the discussion follows. The interviewee may see certain animals, stars, faces, buildings, geographical patterns, etc. In this text-free prompt, the likelihood that the researcher will influence the direction of the discussion (at least as far as the starting point is concerned) can be said to be minimal. According to Weiner (2003), the main premise of the technique is that the way people see the blots can reflect how they see the world, and this in turn can reflect how they see themselves. It can be said here that these inkblots prompts are 'culture-free' in that they do not represent forced themes, definitions, ideas, content, etc. of any culture. They only require someone with good eyesight to see them. (It could be said that in this case they top photo-elicitation as far as culture neutrality is concerned, thus making them perhaps more suitable for cross-cultural studies or social sciences studies involving participants from backgrounds other than the researcher's). Harper refers to the Rorschach's technique, praising it because it is a technique 'in which people of different cultures spin out their respective worlds of meaning' (2002: 22).

Rorschach's technique is an example of what is called 'projective techniques' since the responses of interviewees are their own 'projections' (Wellington and Szczerbinski, 2007: 144). The open-ended nature of the material used in such techniques (it being 'inherently ambiguous') provides the interviewee with a chance to express what he or she can see in the inkblots instead of having to talk about and respond to the topics chosen by the researcher. Projective techniques can also include text-based questions, and in this case the question needs to be wide-open 'in the sense that the question means whatever the

respondent chooses to make it mean' (Oppenheim, 1992: 71). Oppenheim gives the example of 'tell me a little about yourself' as a wide-open projective question.

What Rorschach's technique may not be useful with is the ability to sustain the conversation. It is true that it could initiate one, but its role seems to end there. Another challenge is the artificiality that may be perceived in a discussion that revolves around patterns of inkblots, which is a concern of the lack of ecological validity discussed above.

2.1.4 Clean Language technique as an example of word-based interview prompts

'Talk around texts' is a method used where interviews are anchored around prepared texts (Paltridge, 2012: 80) and an example is a study done by Peng (2010) where he interviewed Chinese PhD graduates about their thesis acknowledgments sections. He also interviewed their supervisors and people referred to in the acknowledgments. Such a technique provides a way of running the interview around something familiar to the participant (in this case something so familiar that the participant had produced him- or herself).

A conversation technique called Clean Language has been developed by David Grove (Sullivan and Rees, 2011) and was originally designed to be used in psychotherapy to help counsellors, therapists and coaches; however, Sullivan and Rees (2011: viii) maintain that the same technique can also be used between researchers and interviewees. While they do not specify what research contexts the technique can be used in, it can be argued that it is open for a wide range of research involving two people engaging in a discussion with the focus intended to be on the interviewee.

The main idea behind the questions developed for the Clean Language technique was to devise neutral questions that carried no or very few assumptions from the interviewer's side. To do that, the questions are phrased to carry almost no language at all (hence the cleanness). Sullivan and Rees even warn against falling into the temptation of trying to rephrase the participant's utterances (although rephrasing can be seen as a way of showing

understanding and that one is actively listening (Dana et al., 1992; Goleman, 1996; Ryan et al., 2009; McHugh, 2015)). The suggested twelve basic questions in this technique are almost language-free and the instructions in the training materials are to use the questions exactly in the way they are phrased. Examples include 'What type of X is that X?' and 'Is there anything else about X?' where 'X' is a metaphor or an expression that the interviewee produced themselves (p. 6). So, for example, if the client says, "I feel like I am on a rollercoaster", the questioner will follow that with "what type of rollercoaster is that rollercoaster?" In this case, the client will be prompted to describe the rollercoaster (and there is a range of ways to describe rollercoasters; they can be fun, dangerous, exciting, silly, unpredictable, etc.). This makes the questions 'ultra-Open' (p. 4) and 'minimises the amount of 'contamination' from the questioner, freeing up the resources of the person being questioned so that they can think effectively for themselves' (p. 10).

It is clear from this approach that there is a need to use prompts (even if they are word-based) that carry very few assumptions so as 'not to pollute' the thinking process of the interviewee (p. 29). Sullivan and Rees (2011) maintain that the control, as far as the content of the interview is concerned, needs to be in the hands of the interviewee so that they can construct their own world without almost any input from the interviewer, hence the word clean. They argue that '[t]he rule is: the less you [the interviewer] put in, the more they [the interviewee] will get out.' (p. 52). Mishler (1991) maintains that standardising (or what he calls neutralising) the stimulus is something that research interviewers aspire to achieve in order for their participants' responses to be indeed their responses rather than a mixture of their answers with the interference due to the phrasing of the question.

2.1.5 Can sacred texts be added to the research interview-enhancing toolbox? – The research gap

In a complex social world, no one research method can 'capture the whole story' (Wellington and Szczerbinski, 2007: 13) when it comes to social sciences research. It is for that reason

that many research methods and techniques are used (and possible new ones can be examined to check whether they can be introduced) in the study of people. Sacred texts share some of the qualities found in the research interview prompts and enhancing techniques mentioned above. They also have some other qualities that can help solve some of the challenges facing other prompts. Since the possibility of their use as enhancing tools in social research interviews has not been investigated before, this research embarks on this inquiry.

However, to utilise sacred texts in social sciences research, it is worth discussing the possibility of categorising potential research participants based on their self-identified religious affiliations, and this is the focus of the following section.

2.2 Using religious lines to add to people's rich description (rather than their nationalities only)

Categorising individuals along their national lines (i.e. based on their nationality) for the purpose of social research has faced some criticism in the literature (for example, by McSweeney, 2002a; Myers and Tan, 2002; Baskerville, 2003). Following are some of the challenges and criticisms of such categorisation approaches. This is followed by an argument in favour of using religious lines to consider individuals in recruiting and studying participants for the purpose of social research.

2.2.1 Challenges and criticisms of using national lines to compare and study individuals

Hofstede (2005) presented his framework of values in management in a nation-based frame. This means that cultures, according to Hofstede, are related to nation states. Although he warns against stereotyping and against generalising his findings to include every person in a nation (and the same warning is given by Cornes, 2004, and Piller, 2011), the ease with which his model can be used seems to (mis)lead some to use it with little care.

This national model of cultures (presented by Hofstede, Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, among others) has some reasons to justify the link between a nation state and a culture. Having the same laws, language, and sometimes religion, and sharing history, geography, and weather conditions can contribute to an expected high level of similarity in behaviour that could lead to calling this group or that group a culture distinct from other groups based on the nation state. The use of nation states as units of comparison also has the advantage of ease of study. After all, it is easier to identify people's nationalities (more or less), for example, through their possession of official documents such as passports and/or ID cards. However, because culture is much more than belonging to a nation state, the national model falls short when it comes to explaining why there is usually a range of subcultures or why countries with the same language, religion, and sometimes laws would differ. Borders (as in national states) can hardly explain this. Also being born in a certain place is more or less like being born on a certain day or date or in a certain month; it lacks the credible explanation of using such datum to categorise, study, or link people's behaviour (which can be said to challenge the construct validity of the data when examining the relationship between the behaviour and place of birth (Bryman, 2016)). However, the national model has been used extensively in much literature across many different disciplines (such as business, marketing, teaching, international relations, etc.).

Hofstede (1998: 17) himself acknowledges that the use of nations as the units to compare cultures is 'debatable'. He goes on to explain that '[m]ost anthropologists shy away from nations as units for studying culture. They are basically right, as nations can host many cultures in the anthropological sense, and cultures can bridge more than one nation.' He then justifies the use of the nation level by saying that '[i]f data are partly collected from secondary sources, as in most comparative research, one can hardly escape from using the nation level' (p. 17). It is unclear as to why this is the case. When Hofstede maintains that the use of nation states as the units to study cultures may not be proper 'in the anthropological sense', it could be that he is suggesting that it could be appropriate in other

senses. These other senses may have to do with business, laws and nation-based practices that may be institutionalised enough to be standardised within a country and different enough when compared to other states. It could also be the case that in businesses, companies, immigration, education, etc., one's passport seems to be (the) one determining factor in the services one is entitled to, the fee structure followed, voting rights given, residency status and so on.

The challenge of studying groups or individuals along national lines gets more complex when the individuals do not typically meet the criterion of having been born and raised in the same country. In Otsuji's (2010: 189) work, she refers to some mistaken identities she had assumed because of what some of her students looked like. She herself, having been born in the United States to Japanese parents, and having lived in several countries, faced a casual comment from one of her students who said to her "Then you are not Japanese." A clear question is inevitable: what does it mean to be of a certain national culture? A similar question may be triggered when some countries talk about what it means to be British or European or American.

Smith and Bond (1993) maintain that it is difficult to answer the question around what differences are to be there to place one under one culture not another. In other words, how can one justify the distinction between two populations? How significant should the difference(s) be? Smith and Bond also maintain that there is a need to pay attention to individuals and do the studies at the individual rather than the culture level. After all, one rarely deals with cultures or average people or the majority of people anyway (unless the topic under discussion is to do with marketing, selling, or something related to numbers represented by people). In real life, individuals interact with individuals who bring to the interaction more than a mere nationality.

2.2.2 The possibility of using religious lines to add depth to the study of individuals

Hinnenkamp (1987) warns against using culture to explain all the differences in people's behaviour. Social research may benefit from studying and/or categorising individuals along religious lines, which can add some depth to the study of people. Following are some reasons that could justify the possibility of a more accurate categorisation in favour of studying people along religious lines: The existence of a written code that could serve as a point of reference, the voluntary assent to religions, the exclusive nature of subscription to a faith, and the more credible theoretical links that could be made between a set of beliefs and social behaviour.

2.2.2.1 A written code – A point of reference

Religions have written codes (in the form of sacred writings). This can facilitate the search for typicality due to the presence of a point of reference. If a discussion about whether one person is a typical Muslim, reference to the Quran can be a logical step. While this point of reference can and does depend greatly on one's interpretation, at least there is one text that all followers of that faith agree to be sacred. Such is not always the case when people are categorised along national cultural lines, where one cannot refer to any explicit codes (such as local laws or a written constitution) to assess, for example, one's Egyptianness or Britishness. Apart from holding a specific passport, there may be no stronger argument to attest to the typicality of one individual to the national culture (especially if nationality is established by the place of birth and not by being raised and having lived in a country for one's formative years).

The fact that one admits that he or she follows a certain faith entails automatically that he or she subscribes to the holy book of that faith. It also entails that he or she does not subscribe to other holy books as sacred or inspired. It is worth noting here that such subscription is on

a spectrum, and faith followers may vary widely in their assent to the text (especially to its literal interpretation) (Geiger, 2017).

Having a point of reference can help (as far as research interviews are concerned) in having justifiable presumptions about the interviewee, about which an interviewer can be confident. If one self-identifies as a Muslim, one can be confident that this person believes that the Quran is the Word of Allah and that, for example, prayers and giving to charity are important. Such confidence is difficult when all one knows about an interviewee is that he or she is French, because in this case, what presumptions can the interviewer hold? Holding to the French values could be one, but it is unclear what French values are.

2.2.2.2 The voluntary subscription to an identity

The voluntary subscription, or at least the voluntary self-identification as a follower of a certain faith, is another reason that can justify using religious affiliations in a social study. This may not be the case with being born in a certain place or holding a certain passport. One may not have the choice to be and/or remain French, or English or Egyptian, but the choice is theoretically there when it comes to following a certain set of beliefs (i.e. a religion). Some may be only nominally Muslims or Christians (Beltz, 2006); however, there is more content that can be presumed if one self-identifies as a faith follower. Typicality is still difficult in both cases (of nationality and religion); however, there are more chances with freer choices when religion is concerned. At least people can identify or relate to a certain religion as theirs.

2.2.2.3 The exclusive nature of religious beliefs

By nature, faiths in their current known forms at any given point of time are exclusive; an individual cannot self-identify as both Christian and Muslim at the same time. One cannot say that they believe that the Bible and the Quran in their current forms are both the exclusive Word of God. Some faith followers, however, may believe in similar prophets or principles or overlapping values, but they would call themselves only one thing. (For

example, Christians believe that the Old Testament is inspired by God, which is the same belief held by the Jews, but they believe that it is yet one part of the Bible which is only complete with the New Testament.) Even within the same overarching belief (for example, Christianity), one may be even more specific in belonging to or identifying with a certain denomination, and by nature, this means that he or she does not belong to other denominations. On the other hand, circles of identity along other lines of categorisation (for example, based on professions, nationalities, age, social class, marital status, etc.) can and do overlap, which may result in some phenomena that can be very difficult to pin down to one circle. Besides the very circle (of what can be termed culture) can be hazy as well (Sperber, 1996 and Žegarac, 2007).

Even when a religion has developed some of its rituals or beliefs through borrowing or adapting some themes, practices or stories from other religions, myths, or cultures, the exclusive labelling of the religion at any given point of time still sets it apart from other labels. This means that even with practices that are traced back to some pagan beliefs, once adopted in a religious tradition, they become part of that religion regardless of their origins. After all, one does not describe him- or herself as mostly Christian with some pagan practices, for example.

On the other hand, one can be a national of two countries at the same time. One can be born and raised in a country and then move to another and live there for 20 years; is he or she of both nationalities? This is not the case in religion; it follows what seems to be an either/or pattern: one is either a Christian or a non-Christian. One may be a good, bad, practising, devoted, humble, extreme, etc. Christian (or any other adjectives), but it is not possible to be both a Christian and a Muslim at the same time. This in itself is a significant point as far as sampling for research interviews is concerned. While it is not unheard of for someone to describe him- or herself as half-British-half-Pakistani, it is highly unlikely for someone to self-identify as half-atheist-half-Muslim or half-Christian-half-Buddhist.

2.2.2.4 More credible theoretical links between beliefs and behaviour

Another element is the logical connection that could be established between beliefs and social behaviour. While there is no clear belief behind being of a certain nationality (and it is telling how challenging it could be to engage in a discussion to talk about British values or Western values, or what it means to be Japanese, for example, (Otsuji, 2010)), one can easily link some behaviour to being a Christian or Muslim or Buddhist. This element can add more credibility to the logic of sampling based on the self-identification of one's beliefs (which can affect one's behaviour). This is because people are generally expected to practise what they believe in, and sacred texts provide researchers with something concrete in which they can expect their participants who self-identify as faith followers to believe. Even when some faith followers do not follow all their religious teachings, there is some expectation of at least being answerable to the commandments, values and concepts held in the sacred writings that one follows.

Linking one's place of birth or date of birth to their expected (or actual) behaviour may lack what some research paradigms call the internal validity (Bryman, 2016), where causal relations are argued to explain one's behaviour. However, sets of religious beliefs may provide a more logical causal relation (even if not completely so) to link (or study) what people do and what they believe in.

Now that the argument for utilising self-professed religious beliefs (instead of only participants' nationalities) to categorise individuals for social research purposes has been put forward, the following discussion presents some of the cultural and linguistic challenges in conducting social research in general. The argument proceeds to suggest that some of those challenges can be mitigated if sacred texts are used as tools in social research interviews.

2.3 Asking the 'right' question(s) - Challenges in studying social issues

There are specific challenges in social research when the researcher studies individuals from backgrounds different to his or her own (Adler, 1983). The challenges discussed in this section are: the impact of the researchers' culture on the research design, the challenge of using language, and the challenge of translation. These challenges are discussed from a general social research viewpoint and are not limited to this research, i.e. the 'researcher' here means any researcher, and it does not refer exclusively to the author.

2.3.1 The impact of a researcher's culture on research design

The Western bias in much social research is not only in the observation that many researchers come from the West but in the research practices where research designs, questionnaire wordings and most of the research setting are based around Western values and common practices (Wong and Poon, 2010; Gobo, 2011). It could be that because such practices are common to the researchers, they are blind to how people from other social or cultural backgrounds may perceive such commonness. This is inevitable in most social sciences research; however, the stakes are much higher when the research investigates people from other societies. For instance, a researcher who embarks on investigating other cultures' perception of time usually sets fixed time slots for interviews or asks for questionnaires to be filled and returned by a certain date or uses a linear fashion in the research process, so he or she basically investigates time perception while applying his or her own time perception as the norm. What often goes missing is that questionnaires, consent forms, interview schedules, observation checklists are all cultural products in some sense as are cars, Facebook, falafel, and football. Being widely available and acceptable in the world of research does not cancel the fact that they are tools designed in and by a culture and, therefore, carry features matching this culture more than other cultures. If what is being investigated is a society, the tool used needs to be robust and as culture-free as possible so it can be sensitive to the real cultural input, and not simply carry the contamination of the culture in the tool itself.

Research interview settings are situations that are socially practised (Smith and Bond, 1993), and while more people in the West may be more familiar with research interviews, the setting can still be artificial for some other cultures. The challenge, then, is to conduct research interviews that mimic real discussions and are perceived by participants to be dialogues that are as natural as possible within their own social norms.

This is echoed in Smith and Bond's (1993: 31) concern about the problem of equivalence in social psychology research when it comes to research tradition to start with. They maintain that, '[m]any people grow up in cultures where political polls, consumer surveys, Kinsey-type interviews and subject pool requirements are taken for granted, along with the assurance that response confidentiality will be honoured. Neither this research tradition nor the guarantee of anonymity can be presumed to obtain in most cultures. Social science may not be practised at all, or may be highly politicized.' These sometimes-taken-for-granted assumptions may stand in the way between researchers and the researched. A researcher may think that research is a normal neutral setting with which respondents should be familiar, comfortable, and generally agreeable. However, the novelty of the setting, or the different connotation may influence the data gathered. The call is, therefore, for 'innovative methodologies' to replace or enhance traditional methods 'to ensure that the outcome of the resulting research has a claim to validity.' (Smith and Bond, 1993: 31)

Studies of societies and cultures are replete with examples where a questionnaire item is designed (supposedly with the best intentions and abilities of the researchers) while at the same time carrying clear (or sometimes subtle) cultural biases. Hall (1989) maintains that one is usually blind to their own culture, and this is usually reflected in the general (possibly universal) feeling that one's culture is 'natural', 'normal' and probably 'right'. Hall uses the expression Cultural Unconscious to compare such a phenomenon to Freud's psychological unconscious which needs some external help to unearth its details.

In one of their studies on management across cultures, Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (2007) set out to investigate where every national culture can be placed on a continuum of a Diffuse-Specific dimension. Diffuse cultures according to Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner are those societies where the different roles played by people overlap, while in specific cultures one can play different roles in the society without these roles overlapping. One question was 'Would you agree to help your boss paint his house at the weekend if you didn't want to?' The expectation was that a yes would refer to a diffuse culture and a no to a specific one. The researchers reported on their surprise at the Japanese answer (the Japanese said no). The two researchers reported that they interviewed the Japanese to understand this unexpected answer only to be surprised at their explanation: The Japanese never paint houses! The fact that painting a house as a theme is translatable into the informants' language does not mean that the whole package of culture behind such an activity is. Researchers do not always have the luxury of interviewing informants if the findings are surprising. One worry is that a considerable amount of research may have gone through such cultural bias without the ability, time, or even attention to investigate surprising findings further. Furthermore, some research results might not have been surprising enough to need reinvestigation while some misunderstanding may have still been the case.

In the previous example, it can be noticed that helping one's boss paint his house at the weekend if one did not want to is a very loaded utterance and could refer to many combinations of propositions. What is helping? And what is meant by boss: a stranger, or someone of a higher rank, or family (knowing the work ethics in Japan)? And what is 'not wanting'? Is it that one would rather not do it? Painting the house may have been a shockingly obvious reason why the Japanese said no, but there are (and could be) other subtle nuances in the questions that could trigger different things. It is important to note here that it is totally fine to trigger different meanings to the same text when doing a social study, if the research focus, for example, is to investigate what painting the boss's house means to every participant. What is not acceptable is to use the triggered meaning to map individuals

into dimensions that the researcher thinks are clear from the question (as in diffuse and specific cultures in this example). The reason is that the original utterance triggers something specific within the researcher's frame of reference (in this case: painting a house is a usual activity that some people do at weekends from time to time) which unfortunately represented something totally different to the participants.

The importance of the way in which questions are phrased (Lever, 1981; Dana et al., 1992) or the possibility of the misinterpretation thereof (Arksey and Knight, 1999) should be no surprise. Schuman (1982) maintains that the answers to a piece of research are usually influenced by the way the questions are phrased and by who asks them. Hollway and Jefferson (2000: 11) criticise researchers who assume 'that a shared meaning attaches to words' to the extent that some studies fail, according to Hollway and Jefferson, to report on how questions were phrased, depending only on the responses of participants. While questionnaire or interview question designers are expected to phrase their questions impartially, it can be argued that this impartiality is theoretically impossible as long as language is used. The intertwining nature of culture and language makes it almost impossible to come up with a culture-free text (Williamson, 2002).

In their study of AIDS among minorities in the USA, Alonso and Koreck (1989) needed to first deconstruct their own language before conducting the research in Spanish. Although the questions were in the informants' language (Spanish), and although there was no difficulty in the translation *per se* (as the target language does have terms equivalent to homosexual, bisexual, and heterosexual), the use of the language itself was different. Commenting on that study, Maier (1995: 33) maintains that, 'the implementation of Western "epistemological assumptions and research methodologies" (…) has not been proven to be effective in AIDS research among Latinos because researchers were not asking the appropriate questions, even though they asked their questions in Spanish.' Appropriate questions here can be understood to mean those questions that carry some resonance to the participants and not just reflect the correct translation of the researcher's wording.

Donna Mertens (2009) talks about an initiative to prevent HIV AIDS in Botswana where a previous initiative failed due to – according to her – the use of approaches that were insensitive to the culture not taking into consideration the power differences between men and women and the rich and the poor to the extent that some English sentences (used on billboards) were perceived to be insulting to the community. She goes on to say that the initiative she is involved with involves the youth to create a 'culturally-relevant way of discussing HIV AIDS' (minute 8:35) to the extent that the name HIV AIDS is not used at all, but they used only references to it as the disease caused by such and such depending on the age group and the mode of transmission.

Rubin and Rubin (2012: 184) refer also to the challenge of how the interview questions are worded in terms of the 'directness or indirectness'. This resonates with Edward Hall's (1989) famous cultural distinction of high-context and low-context of communication. The degree of hedging or the tendency to avoid imposition on others may be reflected in the way the interview question is worded and asked (and as a result in the way it can be perceived by the interviewee through his or her cultural lens).

Since every society has its own beliefs, values and norms, a society seems to collectively agree on what can and what cannot be discussed. While there could be some transcultural taboo topics (that could be generally frowned upon if discussed in most cultures), there is no guarantee that a researcher can confidently establish what is acceptable and what is not in other cultures (including the one(s) he or she is studying). Rubin and Rubin (2012: 185) believe that '[w]hat might seem an acceptable question in the interviewer's culture may be shockingly unacceptable in the conversational partner's [the interviewee's] world.' While such a challenge can be dealt with by piloting the interview questions (Berg and Lune, 2014) and asking some experts, it is more challenging when it comes to follow-up questions and other comments during the interview. (Sacred texts can help with this as they would be generally almost always acceptable by those who subscribe to the book. While the same challenge remains as far as the follow-up questions are concerned, the discussion can

always revert to the sacred text as a haven that is sure not to trigger a ‘taboo’ reaction at least as far as the prompt wording is concerned.)

Smith and Bond (1993: 64) maintain that there is a need for cross-cultural studies that take an emic- as well as etic- approach. They cite a few incidents where it was difficult for research to really understand the local challenges, meanings, and interpretations due to ‘an imposed-etic measure’. Emic and etic distinctions were introduced in linguistics as suffixes for phonemics and phonetics respectively. In research terms, etic refers to the generalisable nature of research while emic refers to the local understanding. This dilemma has been around for a while: research is in many cases designed and applied in the West, then a desire emerges to take it along to study other societies (Harris, 1976). The challenge is that those other societies may not share the basic assumptions upon which this research was designed. The fact that it produced results in the West does not necessarily or automatically mean its success in other countries. Success here could be a complicated term too, because the same research could in fact produce results, but those results could be describing something totally different, which would question the credibility of such data. Moreover, no matter how much a researcher fine-tunes the West-based research to suit the local community, they may still run the risk of missing some themes altogether if they are not looking for them anyway!

This led to the suggestion that emic-based research should be the way forward. In this suggestion, research should start at the local level, and then the themes or dimensions can be analysed to see whether they match or can be correlated to other Western equivalents (Shordike et al., 2010). This local approach is expected to reflect the cultural nuances instead of just applying the same questionnaires or interview schedules designed in the West to other cultures. However, the practical question is obviously how! Should the researchers be local? Should they be Westerners with the help of the locals? If the local helpers are of the same culture as those to be researched, would their help be West-oriented?

Smith and Bond (1993: 74) draw the attention to the debate of etic/emic research, acknowledging the challenges facing both and the practicalities required. They agree that '[e]tic researchers look for general principles' which is easily justified in the intercultural communication field, for example. On the other hand, they also understand that '[e]mic researchers seek to build indigenous psychologies.' They go on to give an example of clothing to illustrate the debate between the two teams, maintaining that

> '[t]he debate between the two positions is like an imaginary debate which we sometimes ponder on: one faction points out that almost everyone in the world wears clothes; the other investigates the types of clothing worn at particular places or times. One faction has a not very useful generalization. The other has a mass of descriptive data.'

It is worth noting that Smith and Bond here are referring to what could be considered transcultural or pancultural: something that exists almost everywhere in the world while at the same time carries some local significance specific to groups or cultures. Although the examples of clothing, food, sexual relations, possessions or other seemingly-universal themes are valid ones, these areas do not make it any easier for comparative research. How would a study on food be emic- and etic-oriented at the same time? The need to use words is inevitable. The need here is not for emic- and etic- themes or practices or phenomena, but for emic- and etic-oriented research 'tools'; otherwise, the study would be 'about' something comparable, but the method itself will have to draw upon the researcher's preferences and research practices. Smith and Bond go on to say that '[w]hat is needed is a way of linking the two approaches – an emic way of being etic!' This is the promise offered by sacred texts: 'an emic way of being etic': a universal text that carries personal meanings; a personal text that exists across cultures, social groups, age groups, professions, genders, etc. Helpful as they are in getting some useful insights, imposed etic methods do not necessarily lead to an easy ride as far as interpretation of the results is concerned. Smith and Bond (1993: 109) maintain that this is because participants in such studies 'are being asked to respond to stimuli presented to them in a way which they may find difficult to comprehend.'

Because it is the personal interpretation and understanding that are of interest to researchers, a focus on the emic (or personal) mental representation of the informant is the target (Goodenough, 1970). This can happen by starting from the public (etic) to form a platform to understand the personal (Pike, 1967).

When Lincoln and Guba (1985: 239) discuss the naturalistic inquiry, they mention nonhuman research instruments, but they do not seem optimistic about their fit in different phases in naturalistic inquiries. They say, 'there is no hope that such [nonhuman] instruments can expose anything not built into them by the instrument maker, and what he or she puts in cannot be determined in any other way than on the basis of *a priori* theory or personal predilection. Such instruments simply cannot reflect the constructions of the respondents, but only of the instrument maker.' This is perhaps why Mishler (1991: 15) maintains that one challenge in interview designs is to 'standardize the stimulus or, perhaps a better term, to neutralize it.'

It can be generally safe to echo what Rubin and Rubin (2012: 20) call the 'cultural lenses' through which researchers approach their research. Through the researcher's cultural lens, he or she sees what topic to investigate, which questions to ask and what meaning to find in the data.

2.3.2 The challenge of using language

Language is not simply a vehicle to express people's thoughts. Language forms and creates the thoughts, and it constructs the world we live in and constructs who we are (Whorf, 1997). Social constructionism adopts this opinion, and Burr (2001: 34) comments along these lines saying that '[t]his is what is meant by the phrase … that 'language is not transparent', i.e. we should guard against the (common-sense) assumption that language is nothing more than a clear, pure medium through which our thoughts and feelings can be made available to others.' So as far as interview questions and questionnaire items are concerned, one cannot assume that as long as the item is properly translated it will not carry a bias towards the

original language. This is because the original language is not simply a clear medium that serves only to carry the message; it has more than that. The inherent meaning will not be totally language-free, as it were.

Burr (2001: 39) maintains that ‘we can only represent our experiences to ourselves and to others by using the concepts embedded in our language, so that our thoughts, or feelings, and how we represent our behaviour are all ‘pre-packaged’ by language.’ In her talk about some of the challenges in countries doing elections for the first time, Philippa Neave (2016) refers to what Aristotle said: that ‘if something doesn't exist, there's no word for it, and if there's no word for something, that something doesn't exist.’ She was referring to the challenges of coming up with the terminology around democracy, ballot boxes, polling stations and other related concepts. She maintained that even in some same-language speaking countries (Arabic-speaking countries in the Middle East), different words (with different connotations) were used for sometimes-similar concepts (for example, the words observer, follower, and controller in the election process). To think about this issue from a research point of view, any research will investigate (almost) only the themes (be it thoughts, feelings, behaviours, categories, attitudes, etc.) that are available in the researcher’s language(s). Anything beyond that (anything that is not expressible in the researcher’s language(s)) will be difficult to cross his or her mind to start with, let alone to trigger him or her to investigate in research.

In his discussion on the meaning of words, Roger Bell (1993: 98–99) makes a distinction between the denotative and connotative natures of words. He explains that denotative ‘refers to meaning which is referential, objective and cognitive and, hence, the shared property of the speech community which uses the language of which the word or sentence forms a part.’ He contrasts this with the connotative which ‘refers to meaning which is not referential but associational, subjective and affective. This kind of meaning, being personal, may or may not be shared by the community at large.’ Roger Bell here points out the seemingly shared

meaning contrasting it to the possibly personal meaning assigned to the same word(s). He goes on to give an example:

> ‘For example, the denotative meaning of the item *dog* in English is straightforward and common property (so to speak). The connotations vary from person to person, extending, no doubt, from servile dedication to the well-being of the species to utter abhorrence and from society to society; the connotations of *kelb* for Arabs are likely to be more negative than those for *dog* for English-speakers, even though the denotation of the two words is identical.’

The dilemma here is when the researcher (who may or may not be the translator as well) wants to investigate something such as how people support those with grief, and the assumption could be that losing a family member, a close friend, a pet, etc. may be themes prompted by the idea of grief. How would losing a pet be translated? Does it carry the assumption of being relevant to a grief situation? Is it included in both cultures’ grief inventory to start with before investigating the similarities and/or differences in reacting to, supporting a grieving friend?

Roger Bell goes on to note that certain words are inherently more challenging in this regard. He maintains that, ‘items like *democracy, love, patriotism,* etc. seem extraordinarily difficult to define in objective terms and are clearly highly emotionally charged’ (p. 99).

So Bell maintains that words do not automatically and simply refer to concepts or ideas that are agreed upon. He maintains that, ‘[t]he words we use and the sentences we embed them in do not merely ‘refer’ to concepts. For each of us the words we choose have associations which mean something particular to us as individual users. They have meanings which are emotional or affective; the result of our own individual experiences which are, presumably, unique and may not form part of any kind of social convention’ (p. 100).

This dilemma in translation sheds some light on the challenges in comparative cultural research or in research with participants from a background different to the researcher’s.

How can research items/questions be translated and at the same time the research is not in jeopardy by the very act of translation?

2.3.3 The challenge of translation of research instruments

The translation process of research instruments (such as questionnaires and interview schedules), information sheets, consent forms, participants' quotes (and other research documents) has not gone unnoticed in the general guidelines given for rigorous research (Brislin, 1986). Smith et al. (2011: 492) maintain that the problems arising in cross-national surveys need 'multiple skilled translators and survey specialists within each country working to arrive at an optimal translation.' Gobo (2011: 418) also maintains that this is paramount especially that researchers still use a lot of monocultural research methods in a world that is full of multicultural areas. Whether it is the wording/translation of the research method or the choice of the very method can result in some challenges in the research process and can in some cases affect the quality of data collected.

The problem in translation does not necessarily lie in expressions that have no equivalents in the target language. The problem could be that the equivalent does exist. It is the understanding of the correctly translated word that may differ across language groups.

2.3.3.1 Translation in general

Translation as an activity attracts a lot of attention as an interdisciplinary process. It does not only involve linguistics, but it also covers a range of disciplines including psychology, pragmatics, and sociolinguistics, among others. Sociolinguistics would consider the source language (the language from which the translation is done) and the target language (the language into which the translation is done) not only in their forms, grammars, lexical pools, etc. but also in the cultures attached to the languages and/or texts translated from and into (Bell, 1993). It is always advisable (or even required) that a translator be aware of both cultures not only languages. However, here is the paradox as far as translating a research instrument for social research is concerned: one needs to be competent in two cultures to

translate (for example, from English) to another language the culture of which could be part of the focus of the study!

Words that are considered synonyms across languages (equivalents) could be misleading in terms of what they are loaded with. After all, words such as love, success, family, marriage, dinner, friends, party and so on do exist across languages; however, their connotations and cultural load may differ significantly. This possibility of a significant difference may not always be obvious to translators.

The process of translation itself requires the understanding of both the original and the target cultures to start with: a process that is usually time consuming and may be difficult to afford, unless in high-stakes cases such as translating sacred texts.

This process is what happens in Bible translation where experts in both cultures put their efforts together to make sure that the target output conveys the original meaning as it was intended to the original audience in today's (and the culture's) understanding within the general understanding of the sacred message contained in the holy book as a whole. While there are still many translations, the general thrust of the original message can be said to be preserved since there is a holistic set of teaching, history and context that can be consulted to arrive at the intended meaning of individual verses, paragraphs, sections and chapters.

Although translation of sacred texts goes through a process similar to that of translating other texts, the stakes are high, and much time and effort are invested (at least in the case of the Bible) in translation. The New Testament of the Bible takes about seven to fifteen years to be translated into a new language (Wycliffe Bible Translators, 2017). Because Bible translation societies understand that the stakes are high (the book being translated being the Word of God), cultural training, translation studies, and other disciplines are tackled over some considerable amount of time. (It takes about four years to train Bible translators, who study about 25 subjects including anthropology, exegesis, church history, cultures of the original lands, etc. (The Word for the World, 2017)) The processes of consultation, piloting,

and proofreading that follow the rigorous painstaking years of translation guarantees a high level of accuracy and clarity. The wide availability of the translated versions of the sacred texts, and the fact that communities now have access to them and use them in ministry, meditations, etc. provides the opportunity for scrutiny of the accuracy and clarity of the text. Such rigour may not be readily available in other texts designed for the research purposes.

2.3.3.2 Bible translation as an example of sacred texts translation

According to Barnwell (2002), the main three steps that the interpretation of the Bible (or any of its books) goes through are exegesis, hermeneutics, and homiletics. In exegesis, the background of the text (or the book/paragraph/chapter) is analysed to understand the context of the original hearers/readers of the passage. The political situation, the cultural context, weather, geography, currency, etc. of the original text are all taken into consideration so the translators can get to know what the text meant (or rather what the speaker/author meant) for the original recipients. What follows is hermeneutics where the text is scrutinised for the message it conveyed. If the original text is a parable, a story, a comparison, a poem, or any other genre/style, there must still be a message: content that the writer or speaker intended for the hearers to understand. This message needs to be clear to the translator and is expected to match the rest of the Scriptures. Then comes homiletics where the translators think of how the same message can be conveyed to current or future readers of the translation. So, for example, the original text could be talking about slaves and masters; understanding the background is paramount to know the dynamics and interactions of these two groups in the society (exegesis). The message is then identified to know what the advice or commandment was about within the context of the section. Was it supporting slavery, obeying those in power, showing kindness to people who are different, or working hard? (hermeneutics). And then once the message is clear, ways of communicating the same message (in the translated form) need to be thought of to communicate the same gist to the new readership (homiletics) (Barnwell, 2002).

All this shows the rigour that goes into translating the Bible and that all verses, sections and paragraphs are expected to have been translated in a context. Teams that have cultural experts, linguists, theologians, historians, and others work together (with the help of commentaries and other translations) to come to grips with the intended message and to be sure that the produced translation sounds as natural, accurate, and clear as possible while maintaining the original message and catering for the targeted culture/language. This increases the likelihood that the produced version is as original as it could be. This luxury of years of understanding the sacred writings, translating, and consultancy work may not be available in other works including research tools such as questionnaires and interview questions.

Having presented some of the cultural and linguistic challenges in conducting social research (and especially conducting naturally flowing interviews), now the discussion can move to the dynamics of communication, since a social research interview is a communicative setting. The next section presents the theoretical take of Relevance Theory on how communication and understanding take place and what type of utterance interviewees and interviewers are naturally expected to face/produce in day-to-day conversational settings.

2.4 Research interviews as communicative settings - Relevance Theory and making a case for the use of sacred texts

This section discusses the main proposals of Relevance Theory linking the discussion with sacred texts as possible utterances to be used in a communicative setting: that of a one-to-one social research interview.

Relevance Theory is a theory of cognition and communication, and according to Sperber and Wilson (2004), human communication does not happen following the code model where utterances represent the intended message encoded in a linguistic form. Rather, inference is

the approach a human mind employs with the presumption that an ostensive stimulus carries enough relevance to be worth processing for some cognitive gain. In other words, a hearer presumes that what the speaker says must carry some meaning that is worth processing to gain some cognitive gain.

It can be argued that social research interviews would benefit from resembling the normal communicative settings instead of having a removed (distanced) feel as a separate domain of social activity. In other words, a social research interview should be dealt with as a dialogue in which normal communicative exchanges take place. Otherwise, one could expect less genuine data to be gathered in a social research interview setting. Hearers (participants) should not be expected to be given random, seemingly irrelevant questions and sentences to comment on from a speaker (researcher) who is interested in their answers. In return, they are expected to produce answers (i.e. as speakers in this case) catering for their hearer (the researcher) so he or she can analyse their utterances for the researcher's benefit. The extreme of an interrogation setting can clarify the opposite end of the spectrum of a communicative setting (where the speaker produces utterances that are not favouring the hearer at all; on the contrary, the hearer may in fact lose if he or she pays attention to the utterances and starts to reply). Mishler (1991: 118) in his discussion on research interviewing, maintains that his intent is

> 'to shift attention away from investigators' "problems," such as technical issues of reliability and validity, to respondents' problems, specifically, their efforts to construct coherent and reasonable worlds of meaning and to make sense of their experiences. This shift leads to the general question of how different types of interviews facilitate or hinder respondents' efforts to make sense of what is happening to them and around them.'

While the notion of a casual conversation may seem less rigorous or less academic in terms of the content, Eggins and Slade (2004: 16) refer to that as the 'central paradox of casual conversation.' They state that while people in general feel the relaxed and spontaneous

atmosphere in a casual conversation, ‘yet casual conversation is a critical site for the social construction of reality.’

For this to happen, i.e. for inter-actants to feel relaxed and to feel that they are being themselves in a spontaneous setting, there needs to be some fulfilment to the Relevance Theory (and intuitive) assumption of the optimal relevance of the ostensive stimulus. A speaker (researcher) should (and is expected to) produce an utterance that is relevant to the hearer (participant). This makes the case for the use of a text relatable to the participant, in comparison with a novel text with which he or she may have nothing or very little to do. After all, it is the worldviews of participants not of researchers that are sought in qualitative interviewing (Bryman, 2016).

Utterances that are more familiar to the hearer are perceived to be more relevant (as they require less processing mental effort) (Sperber and Wilson, 2004). This runs the risk of producing very few contextual effects, though. This makes the case for the need of a text that is familiar but at the same time significant enough to be worth the hearer’s attention. In using sacred texts as tools in interviews, the familiarity here could be the familiarity of the very verse used (in its wording) or the familiarity of the whole holy book (by having access to the domain or to some contexts to do with the spiritual teachings). The significance here is drawn from the assumption that once a believer, one subscribes supposedly automatically to the holy book of the faith followed and gives some reverence to the text with varying degrees.

In a research interview, the need is for utterances that guarantee the activation of some context. With the assumption that a researcher would want his or her utterances to be relevant to the participants, how can he or she guarantee this without the prior knowledge of the candidates? What is the minimum that can be expected? And does the researcher know of a domain of texts (or even of themes) that would automatically be relevant (at least initially) to women, men, the poor, rich, etc.? Sacred texts seem to be the universal as well

as personal tool of choice in this case, especially that no mutual cognitive environment can be established if the interviewer and interviewee see each other for the first time in a research setting.

Holstein and Gubrium (1995), in their discussion of active interviews, maintain that

> '[c]onversational give-and-take around topics of mutual interest is a way of conveying to the respondent that the interviewer is sensitive to, and interested in, the ongoing line of talk. Drawing on mutually familiar events, experiences, or outlooks not only secures rapport … but fixes the conversation on particular horizons of meaning or narrative connections, encouraging the respondent to elaborate.' (p. 77)

This is such an interesting aspiration for all interviewers, but Holstein and Gubrium do not mention how it could be fulfilled (especially in a social study of participants that may be of a background different to the researcher's). The same notion is held by Rubin and Rubin (2012: 7) who acknowledge that while a responsive interview can be seen as partnership, this partnership 'is not completely balanced' since the researcher is in control of the choice of questions, and the expectations are on the interviewee to give almost all the answers. They maintain that 'in responsive interviewing, the researcher customizes questions for each interviewee, accommodating both to what the person knows and to the topics that the conversational partner [i.e. the interviewee] is most comfortable discussing.' (p. 7)

Although Rubin and Rubin (2012: 38) maintain that researchers should pitch their questions to target 'what the individual interviewees are expected to know,' this can prove difficult. It is also challenging to establish their backgrounds (and consequently the mutual interest). How would interviewers conduct active interviews in a way that caters for the needs, interests, backgrounds, and experience of participants if interviewers are not aware of these (which could be one reason why they conduct that research)? (apart from some general demographic information that can be known prior to conducting the interview). Mishler (1991) maintains that one problematic challenge with the formal interview is that it lacks the shared assumptions found in everyday dialogues which are full of contextual commonalities

and mutual knowledge between speakers. One way of increasing relevance is to provide them with a text they are familiar with, so their background, experience, interests, and accounts can be said to have some resonance in that text whether directly or remotely. Otherwise, any texts or prompts provided will run the risk of being painted in the interests and background of the interviewer and/or the designer of the tool and not that of the interviewees.

2.4.1 Encoding, decoding and Relevance Theory

According to Relevance Theory (Sperber and Wilson, 2004), communication does not happen in an encoding-decoding process where meanings are tightly attached to words. Rather, communicators establish their understanding of the verbal input via a process of assessing what an utterance can be meant to communicate in the given context. While there could be a host of meanings in any single utterance, meanings that are not relevant, according to Sperber and Wilson, are discarded in favour of those that make more sense to the hearer in the context provided. This is not restricted to spoken utterances or casual conversations; Sperber and Wilson refer throughout their theory to verbal communication, and they do not seem to suggest huge differences between written and spoken forms. They even suggest that genres may not exhibit different techniques in unpacking the meaning. They maintain that even 'the lengthy and highly self-conscious process of textual interpretation that religious or literary scholars engage in are governed just as much by considerations of relevance as is spontaneous utterance comprehension.' (2004: 75)

2.4.2 The guarantee of a context

A sacred text guarantees the existence of a context that carries the promise of some accessibility provided that the hearer subscribes to the text. This is simply because the text belongs to a higher authority (God/Allah) who is revered and followed by the relevant faith follower. The mere fact of being the Word of God/Allah gives the text an automatic green light to acceptance for the faith followers, perhaps at varying degrees. Accessibility can vary

from one person to another, one culture to another, and towards one verse to another. However, the mere fact that one subscribes (or believes to subscribe) to a sacred text would inherently mean the relevance of the whole book to him or her. This feature minimises the sometimes wrong expectations of researchers who may think of a particular context as worth accessing more than another (when using other prompts in social research interviews).

In a social research interview setting, Bryman (2016) agrees with Mason (2002) in that general questions should be avoided as they usually lack the required specificity for the participant to give a meaningful answer. When a too-general question is asked, the participant, according to Mason, is tempted to ask for some clarification or for some context. Anchoring the qualitative interview around sacred texts can provide a context (or more), and such a context can be one that the participant rather than the researcher has come up with. At least initially, the participant would be coming to an interview setting that is already anchored in a big whole (that of texts from the same holy source).

This guarantee is not a guarantee of one same context excluding others. It is not a guarantee of certain implicatures to be arrived at either. It is only a guarantee of having a context (or more). Or it could be more precisely the justification of expecting to have a context! So the researcher can know that the participant will be able to locate the utterance (in this case a sacred verse) somewhere in their cognitive environment. (Such a guarantee cannot be justified with other texts; after all, how can a researcher know for sure (or even at all) that his or her question will find fertile soil in the participant's mind? But with sacred texts, one can be justifiable in thinking that since the participant believes in this text to be of a high authority, the word of God/Allah, and a source of life-changing content, he or she must have got something to say about it. Even if a participant does not have a direct comment to make on a specific verse, they do have access to a wider (possibly-related) context or domain to draw upon.) It is those 'contextual grounds of understanding' that seem to represent the 'gap' between naturally occurring (casual) conversations and interview dialogues that are conducted without enough knowledge of the participants' own contexts (Mishler, 1991: 3).

One verse can trigger a host of contexts and this could differ among people, and this can point to the versatility of such a universal instrument: with the guarantee of the existence of a context; without necessarily knowing what the context is; because informants tell the researcher what they think; and from there, the conversation can progress to where it has been directed by their context. The researcher can then draw their conclusions about the participants or their backgrounds or cultures, etc. from their accessed contexts.

It is intuitively understandable that the same linguistically coded utterance can be interpreted in a variety of ways (Wilson and Sperber, 1998) as there is no one guaranteed way of understanding based on decoding the words. Wellington and Szczerbinski (2007: 111), in their comments on understanding documents, maintain that the meaning carried in a document 'depends on the intentions of the author(s) and the perspectives of the reader.' They go on to suggest that '[t]o search for a single, objective, essential meaning is to search for a chimera.' It is that quality of documents (including sacred texts as far as this research is concerned) that makes their use have this promising potential, since '[i]t is a matter of interpretation' which is exactly what is sought in a sacred-text-enhanced interview.

Wilson and Sperber (1998: 11) even say that 'in order to be acceptable and comprehensible, an utterance does not actually have to be optimally relevant, but merely such that the speaker might reasonably have expected it to be.' This means that the speaker can say that he thought the hearer would know what the speaker was referring to and this expectation would justify the speaker's use of a certain utterance even if the utterance is not technically of optimal relevance from the hearer's side. That is the reason, in the empirical part of this research, that it can be justifiably believed that the hearers (participants) can find (or at least think of) the sacred texts used in the interviews to be optimally relevant as they are taken from their sacred books. Their expectation for relevance too adds to the logical presumption and justifies the use of those texts in a communicative setting (a research interview) that aims to be as genuine and authentic as possible.

Wilson and Sperber (1998: 14) also maintain that '[d]ifferent utterances make different assumptions accessible. Differences in the accessibility of contextual assumptions will affect not only the order in which interpretations are tested, but the acceptability of the results.' One, therefore, can say that there is some confidence in the use of sacred texts as utterances as the results of the hearer's search for some suitable contextual assumptions will probably be acceptable, at least in terms of the appropriateness of the context. The accessibility of assumptions drawn from those sacred verses may differ (personally and/or culturally), and it is in these differences that research can investigate personal and/or cultural variations and similarities within the frame of a social study.

2.4.3 Accessibility

Sperber and Wilson (2004: 77) maintain that 'the greater the amount of processing involved in the formation of an assumption, and the more often it is accessed thereafter, the greater its accessibility.' To some faith followers, sacred texts provide this promise of a great amount of processing way before being used in research. When a participant faces a verse that he or she is familiar with, a more easily accessible context is prompted, and this can result in a more genuine discussion in in-depth interviews. On the other hand, hypothetical questionnaire/interview questions (using vignettes, for example) may either not prompt anything or force an artificial process of inference to come up with an answer that seems good (or good enough). This may be reduced if the questions revolve around something sacred, i.e. too high in value and dear to respondents to give a merely agreeable good-sounding answer. Orne (1962) speaks of demand characteristics where participants respond to questions posed by researchers while trying to expect the 'theories' that the researchers are after.

Sperber and Wilson (2004: 142) also believe that even before choosing the context, a hearer would assess relevance and whether the utterance is worth paying attention to. They maintain that 'people hope that the assumption being processed is relevant (…), and they try to select a context which will justify that hope: a context which will maximise relevance.' With

sacred texts, relevance (in the common sense of the word, not in Sperber and Wilson's theory) is a given in the selection stage (when followers of a certain faith are chosen and asked questions around texts to which they already subscribe). This personal nature of the text (driven from the personal decision to follow or at least continue following a certain faith) does not contradict the public nature of the very text: a promising phenomenon in social sciences inquiries, especially in studies that seek some comparisons (for example, cross-cultural studies).

2.4.4 The processing effort

Although the processing effort could be high when responding to a sacred text prompt, this high processing effort is justified (perhaps not just by the cognitive gain, but maybe by the sacredness of the prompt). It is as if the very use of a sacred text is a communicative act worth paying attention to (along with or perhaps regardless of the content). In this case, it is the case of paying attention to what an important person (in this case God or Allah) says (regardless of or besides the importance, difficulty, ease, etc. of what he says). But it could also be that one is eager to know and understand what he or she loves or holds dear. Studying and discussing sacred texts in general (as part of one's personal spiritual life) may naturally involve a lot of mental efforts for the satisfying feeling of getting to grips with the content. This could be why people join Bible study groups, go to spiritual conferences, and listen to sacred texts interpretation (including the explanation of the original languages).

2.4.4.1 From the hearer's side

In their discussion on the processing effort, Wilson and Sperber (1998: 9) propose that there are two factors affecting the processing effort exerted by the hearer to interpret the utterance: 'the form in which it is presented (audibility, legibility, dialect, register, syntactic complexity and familiarity of construction all affect processing effort).' It is clear here that Wilson and Sperber are referring to the *familiarity of construction* which can be taken to mean the actual phrasing of the utterance. This comes as no surprise and can justify why people in general will feel comfortable around common sayings and proverbs with which

they are familiar. The construction of the common saying or movie lines or song lyrics (not just the gist) needs to be fixed; perhaps to save on the processing effort while at the same time carry lifelong collective experience and wisdom in the situation(s) in which it is used. In using sacred texts in social research, participants (hearers) are given texts of high familiarity of construction, which can affect the processing effort (in this case decreasing it) facilitating a smooth interaction.

Wilson and Sperber (1998) go on to discuss the other factor that affects the processing effort which is 'the effort of memory and imagination needed to construct a suitable context.' This is another feature of sacred texts as they can sometimes be memorised by some followers of faith like other sayings, quotes, etc. This decreases the effort of memory needed. Wilson and Sperber maintain that if the processing effort is too much (considering the cognitive effect gained), the speaker runs the risk of losing the hearer's attention. The hearer in this case would rather attend to some other utterance that requires less processing effort and/or guarantees more cognitive gain. While in a voluntary research interview the hearer may not be completely lost, the processing effort on them will be unnecessarily high, which may lead them to shift their attention to other less-effort-requiring contexts.

Wilson and Sperber (1998: 14) also maintain that 'by virtue of frequent use' a schema can be seen as more likely to be accessible. Although the familiarity of a schema may differ from the familiarity of the utterance itself, we can find both in the use of sacred texts, as the texts (utterances) can be familiar (in their very wording) and the schemata (the religious teaching, be it Christian or Islamic) are familiar too (for participants who self-identify as Christians or Muslim respectively).

2.4.4.2 From the speaker's side

Wilson and Sperber (1998) maintain that there are also some factors that may affect the way the speakers produce their utterance which may not always lead to the maximal relevance (in the later version of Relevance Theory the term used is 'optimal' not maximal relevance).

These factors include, among others, the stylistic preferences. In this case, the speaker and hearer may not necessarily always share their stylistic preferences, which can lead to the speaker's phrasing their utterances in a way that does not prove (maximally) relevant to attract the hearer's attention. While sacred texts as utterances may not be in the same style naturally preferred by the speaker and/or the hearer (as sacred texts usually have their own genre(s) or style(s)), they are still acceptable in their (possibly unique) style if the whole sacred book (and the faith system) is accepted by the believers. In this case, it is not the way the speaker (researcher) says it as he or she has no personal contribution to the way the texts have been phrased. In this case, no extra effort is needed (on the researcher's side) to phrase the utterance in a certain way, as he or she would only be selecting from among utterances that already exist. This does not rule out the range of translations from which the researcher can choose.

2.4.5 Social research interviews as communicative settings

A research interview setting should resemble daily communication patterns if deep and rich credible data are to be constructed (Lofland, 1971). The interviewer is usually (according to Relevance Theory) expected to produce an utterance that is worthwhile the effort to be exerted by the hearer to unpack its meaning. What needs to be exploited in research is the genuine way of communicating where a speaker uses a prompt that serves the benefits of the hearer so that a normal dialogue can follow. Therefore, it can be intuitively argued that, in an interview setting, the more relatable the prompt is, the more natural the communication is. The more natural the communication is, the more likely the data gathered will resemble real-life data and will shed more genuine insights on the phenomenon investigated, producing ecologically valid output.

2.4.6 Mutual manifestness

The concept of mutual manifestness is central in Relevance Theory, and it can be said that '[a]n assumption is manifest to an individual at a given time if he is capable of representing it

and assessing its (probable) truth' (Jary, 1998: 4). Jary goes on to explain that all these assumptions manifest to an individual form his or her cognitive environment. If these assumptions are manifest to both speaker and hearer (and their manifestness to each other is manifest to both) then they have a mutual cognitive environment. Jary goes on to say that, '[t]he communicator's aim is to make manifest to her audience, by the use of an ostensive stimulus, her intention to make manifest a set of assumptions' (p. 4).

With sacred texts in mind, if the interviewer shares the same faith with the interviewee, there can be the expectation of a shared cognitive environment: a mutual cognitive environment that both the interviewer and interviewee can access. And if this knowledge is known to both (the knowledge that each follows the same faith), then it is mutually manifest. This invites a few questions: Will that facilitate further communication (and consequently lead to better richer data)? Can this be the basis of a general feeling of being on the same page leading to a more honest discussion? Will the mutual manifestness of faith-related contexts inherently assume a certain level of honesty to be expected in the discussion to follow (as opposed to the mutual manifestness of supporting the same football team, for example)? Or would the discourse used then assume a certain level of agreement between the participant and researcher since they share the same faith? Part of the empirical study in this research aims at answering the question on the interviewee-interviewer dynamics with the faith similarity/difference in mind (Research Objective 1).

2.4.7 Optimal relevance

The presumption of optimal relevance in the stimulus used is that it is the suitable way to communicate the speaker's intentions given the needed mental effort and cognitive gain. Hearers in general (and this can be possibly applied to research participants) expect that the utterance used towards them must have something important to add to their cognitive gain. The general feel (on the part of potential research participants) to most traditional research is to wait and see what the researcher wants to know about! There is usually no expectation of a personal cognitive gain for the hearer. Moreover, sometimes the pressure where

participants feel that they really want to help may lead to disproportionate mental efforts (to process the questions addressed at them in a research setting) while – atypically of communicative settings – not expecting to gain worthwhile cognitive gain. They could read too much into the questions; they could avoid answering certain questions for the fear that they may give the 'wrong', 'unhelpful' answer. It can be said that this sort of atypical communicative setting is uncomfortable. It will not be surprising if some of the data gathered in such settings may not be as genuine or natural as one would get from day-to-day casual conversations that presume in general that a certain cognitive gain is worth the mental effort to process what the speaker 'must have meant' by addressing the hearer the way he or she did!

Jary (1998: 11) maintains that 'it is the speaker's choice of stimulus which is of prime interest. This will of course be constrained by the need to use a stimulus which is optimally relevant, one which guides the addressee to the intended interpretation without any gratuitous processing effort.' In the case of this research the stimulus will definitely guide the addressee (participant) to come up with an interpretation from within the context of his or her faith. The efforts exerted in this case are not in vain, and the context intended to be accessed is not as vague or ambiguous or totally unknown as it could be were it another question phrased by the researcher. The researcher-designed question may always carry the risk of touching on the 'wrong' context or confusing the hearer (who will still work hard mentally to access 'any' seemingly-relevant context). Miscommunication may not be surprising in this scenario, because it will be like 'jumping to any context' that could be even remotely related.

2.4.8 Domains, contexts and concepts

According to Relevance Theory, words are thought of as labels for concepts, and a concept is like a mental address under which information is stored. Concepts in general have three related entries: logical, encyclopaedic, and lexical (Matsui, 1998). The lexical entry is related to the linguistic information about the word that expresses the concept, while the logical

entry is mainly a way to objectively describe the concept (Clark, 2013). Encyclopaedic entries are the ones that carry the various themes related to the concept and it could be those entries that are of interest in a social research interview. In other words, the differences between the encyclopaedic entries that people have for the same concept could tell us about their worlds and/or personalities. The linguistic and logical entries of a concept can be the same across different hearers, but it is the encyclopaedic entries where the main interest can lie.

With these terms in mind, using sacred texts in social research interviews or in fact in any sort of communication would activate what can be called the domain of religion, spirituality, morals, relationship with God, the Bible or the Quran, etc. This domain is huge; it contains all the knowledge, experiences, and assumptions that one has about God and possibly God-related themes, activities, organisations, writings, people, religious institutions, etc. This domain will be activated probably once the potential research participant knows about and agrees to take part in the research. The actual discussions during the interview setting are usually about a more specific context (Matsui 1998). So, using verses from the Bible will activate the domain of the Bible or religion or spirituality, etc. and then comes the first set of verses (for example, 'Honor your father and your mother') which will activate (perhaps within this domain, at least initially) a context, for example, honouring parents or parenthood or family life. The utterance itself will have some 'concepts' such as: 'honour' your 'father' and your 'mother'. The concepts honour, father, and mother are three concepts here that the hearer would retrieve to unpack the meaning and respond to the prompt within the context triggered by the utterance (for example, honouring parents or parenthood). The encyclopaedic entries of each concept may differ from one participant to another, and it is in these differences that researchers in the social sciences may be interested, because the encyclopaedic entries in the case of concepts will not have to stick to the 'domain' activated at the beginning. For example, some encyclopaedic entries to the concept of father may include biological male parent, any father figure, any elderly relative in the family, any power

figure in the society, a care taker in the family, an adoptive male parent, among other possibilities. This may help reflect the worlds of participants whose different encyclopaedic entries to the same concept are triggered by the verse.

Sperber and Wilson (2004) also believe that hearers can have more than one context active in a parallel fashion. This carries the promise that in these encyclopaedic entries of those concepts that some personal, social, professional, cultural, habitual, etc. elements can be found, and that can shed some light on the different individuals, leading to some patterns that can be investigated across different groups whether national, professional, age, or gender groups. It is also the promise of not being limited to 'spiritual talk' during a discussion triggered by a religious text (as per the example of what a father means).

Once the encyclopaedic entries of a concept are triggered, they may also trigger other related or unrelated concepts. Matsui (1998) gives an example of an encyclopaedic entry of the concept 'DOG' saying, 'for example, the encyclopaedic entry for the concept 'DOG' may have propositions such as 'DOGS CHASE CATS', 'A PIT BULL IS A DANGEROUS DOG', 'CHOMSKY OWNS A DOG', etc. The crucial point here is that other concepts which appear in these propositions will be activated through activation of the propositions in which they appear. Thus, the concept 'CAT' will be activated through the proposition 'DOGS CHASE CATS'' (p. 148). This means that when a participant is given an utterance, he or she will activate the concepts included in the utterance and they in turn can activate other concepts contained within the propositions of the encyclopaedic entries of the first concepts. This carries the promise of an interview setting where the discussion is guided mainly by the encyclopaedic entries and their branches that the participants (not the researcher) have for the concepts discussed. Concepts differ in how they are activated, and according to Relevance Theory, their accessibility can result from the frequency and/or recency of their use (Matsui, 1998).

One challenge that needs attention is that the familiarity of the sacred texts could be problematic. Although it is good as it requires less processing effort to unpack the meaning; too much familiarity can make the utterance lose its meaning. In their discussion of irony, Sperber and Wilson (1998: 286) talk of 'dead metaphors.' Dead metaphors are dead because they have become so familiar that they have lost their effect. Sperber and Wilson still maintain that those dead metaphors can be revived if 'conscious analysis' puts them in focus (which is a technique used in Clean Language counselling that focuses on metaphors described by participants (Sullivan and Rees, 2011)). The same can apply to sacred texts. They too run the risk of being too familiar that they may lose some of their meaning. 'Love your enemies' may become a cliché that faith followers 'think' they know; they can even think they follow the commandment since they know the phrase by heart. However, a social research interview setting provides this opportunity of some conscious analysis. Also, with some modifications in the research design, more conscious analysis can be encouraged (such as by using contrasting or seemingly-contrasting sets of verses in the discussion or by posing follow-up questions that may challenge one view or another).

Having established the theoretical framework whose tenets are subscribed to in this research, it follows logically to discuss the specifics of interview dynamics, meaning making, and meaning generation from the lens of Social Constructionism, since a social research interviews is a socially constructed event.

2.5 Research interviews as socially constructed events - Social Constructionism, language, and making the case for using interviews

Social Constructionism underpins the author's understanding of the social world and it also underpins how the empirical data are to be constructed, analysed and presented in this study. According to Burr (2001: 3-4), '[t]he ways in which we commonly understand the world, the categories and concepts we use, are historically and culturally specific. Whether one understands the world in terms of men and women, pop music and classical music,

urban life and rural life, past and future, etc., depends on where and when in the world one lives.' This applies also to researchers and research designers whose questionnaires and interview questions are in the category of historically and culturally specific items.

According to Burr (2001: 4), 'all ways of understanding are historically and culturally relative. Not only are they specific to particular cultures and periods of history, they are seen as products of that culture and history, and are dependent upon the particular social and economic arrangements prevailing in that culture at that time. The particular forms of knowledge that abound in any culture are therefore artefacts of it, and we should not assume that *our* ways of understanding are necessarily any better (in terms of being any nearer the truth) than other ways' (italics in original).

This leads to the thought that there is no such a thing as an objective truth. All social knowledge is formed somehow via some sort of perception that is socially constructed. This is obviously in line with relativism in general. The interpretive paradigm, within which this study sits, considers multiple realities rather than one truth. In Burr's (2001: 6) words, 'there can be no such thing as an objective fact. All knowledge is derived from looking at the world from some perspective or other, and is in the service of some interests rather than others.'

2.5.1 Social Constructionism and language

Social Constructionism also looks differently at language and its role in shaping the understanding of the world (Burr, 2001). Language, in this view, is not simply only a way to express or communicate our thoughts; it is, rather, a prerequisite for having such thoughts to start with. In using language, people construct their world not just simply express it. In Burr's (1999: 113) words Social Constructionism sees language 'as constructive rather than descriptive of the world.'

Language, therefore, occupies a central place in Social Constructionism, and it is not simply a passive tool used to express ideas and to help people communicate what they already have in their minds; it is, rather, a powerful constructive device that shapes the world of that

language users. Burr (1999: 115) explains that '[i]t is language that allows people who share a common tongue to generate a common currency of concepts and meanings. It is through their dealings in this common currency that people fabricate their world.' So language is not perceived to be 'passive and unproblematic.' Edward M. Forster (2005: 99) puts it beautifully in the famous quote 'How can I tell what I think till I see what I say?'

2.5.2 Social Constructionism and research interviews

Social research interviews are in themselves social constructs; they are constructs in the sense that they are products of a society which sees discussions with others to obtain some insights as one form of social interaction (Davies and Dodd, 2002; Jenkins et al., 2010; Roulston, 2010) (and hence the need for interviews that run as genuinely and as close to real-life discussions as possible). They are also a place where the world of the interviewee is constructed (through the interaction with the interviewer). This makes interviews (whether one-to-one interviews or focus groups settings) 'the richest source of knowledge about people's understanding of themselves, and the life around them' (Wellington and Szczerbinski, 2007: 91). In this case, there is no 'reality' to be 'discovered' *per se* via posing certain questions. What happens in the linguistic exchange that takes place in a social research interview is the creation or construction of some reality through the use of language. This knowledge (or glimpse of reality) is in no way fixed or stable; it follows the dynamics of the linguistic exchange that takes place and may change or develop differently in other situations. It also follows from the use of language familiar to the participants, as in the argued case of using sacred texts as interview-enhancing tools. Those texts will have been familiar enough to them to the extent that they have probably shaped and constructed parts of their worlds before. Familiar sacred texts will have been contributors to the creation of the worlds of the interviewees who self-identify as Christians or Muslims. The discourse they use to express their identities has been helped by those very (or similar) texts.

What this means is that '[c]onstructions arise not from people attempting to communicate supposed internal states (such as feelings, desires, attitudes, beliefs and so on which

emanate from their ‘personality’) but from their attempts to bring off a representation of themselves or the world that has a liberating, legitimating or otherwise positive effect for them.’ (Burr, 2001: 92) This notion is important because it may seem counter-intuitive in research (where researchers try their best to ‘understand’ and ‘find out’ what is inside of participants). Social Constructionism criticises ‘traditional essentialism which sees cognitions and emotions as originating within the individual before being ‘communicated’ to others’ (Burr, 1999: 118).

One good thing about sacred texts translation is the fact that when these texts are translated, new words could be coined to communicate some notions that exist in the original language(s). In this case, for example, the transliteration of words such as ‘Sharia’ or ‘Sadaqa’ or ‘Halal’ and so on can be introduced (in their original Arabic pronunciation but in English spelling (Messick, 2003)), and with them their notions can be introduced. This means that more or less, nations will have a level playing field where all Christians or Muslims around the world are supposed (at least in theory) to have access to and comprehend the same ‘world’ of religious code (through providing accurate meaningful and clear translation which introduces new words when needed). This can at least theoretically help worshipers everywhere to access the same sets of beliefs, practices and essence of the spiritual message. This perhaps gives some confidence in more equality for participants in terms of their expected socially constructed worlds in the domain of spirituality. They will not at least be disadvantaged because of their language lack of coverage of certain themes. The assumption would be that all spiritual themes will have been covered (and if necessary new words have been coined to serve the purpose) with the goal of presenting all (potential) faith followers around the world with accessibility to the world of Christianity or Islam.

If language is the main influence by which the social world can be constructed, it can be said with confidence that all participants (Christians and Muslims) taking part in a social research that uses sacred texts as enhancing tools have enough language to navigate their spiritual worlds and to construct their own worlds accordingly in a communicative interview setting.

No themes will be alien or indescribable or too culture-specific that they are exclusive, because all the themes covered in holy books would have been worked out by translators and preachers to equip faith followers with the tools (linguistic in this case) to understand the original text. This applies to all faith followers the world over even those who are culturally dissimilar to the culture of the original text. (This is an advantage over other cultural themes that may exist in one culture but not in another, since such a need to communicate the difficult very specific social themes does not always necessarily exist.)

2.5.3 Social Constructionism and the death of the author

Burr (2001: 171) says that

> 'the author of a piece of text and what may be thought of as his or her intentions are completely irrelevant to the analysis. In fact a key feature of poststructuralist writing is sometimes said to be the 'death of the author' – a piece of text may be thought of as a manifestation of prevailing discourses, and we should not be tempted to look inside the heads of particular individuals for their origins.'

This notion seems to be discredited in the Relevance Theory view (Sperber and Wilson, 2004) since a text may not exist without the intentions of an author. Hearers or readers, according to Relevance Theory, presume that there are certain intentions in a text or utterance, and that the intended meaning is expected to be that of the speaker or author and not simply of the linguistic code alone. However, it is perhaps not the death of the author but the 'life' that the text takes when read by various readers. The text can, then, live again depending on the 'readings' assigned to it by various readers. One can argue that rather than the death of the author, it is the life-giving possibility of interpreting the same text differently when different people read it. Even in some analytical techniques (such as the Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)), the concept of 'reading' or 'understanding' others is open for various interpretations. Smith and Osborn (2008: 53), for example, in what is termed 'double hermeneutic', maintain that '[t]he participants are trying to make sense of their world; the researcher is trying to make sense of the participant trying to make sense of

their world.' This can also be extended especially in qualitative research to include the final document readers who try to make sense of the writer's reconstruction of his or her participants' worlds.

In this case, different readers or hearers, all expecting some relevance, may understand the same texts differently based on their different contextual environments: a quality that seems promising with sacred texts as tools in social research interviews as it allows for the flexibility and range of possible interpretations to feature.

Now that the argument for using interviews to get insights into participants' worlds as they construct them in a social interaction has been put forward, the following discussion investigates what the literature on research interviews has to say as far as good-quality interviews are concerned.

2.6 Research interviews as sites to produce high quality data - Criteria for the assessment of interview data richness, depth, and genuineness

2.6.1 Types of research interviews

The social research literature categorises research interviews roughly into structured, semi-structured, and unstructured interviews based on the degree of planning or preparation from the interviewer's side and also on the leeway available for participants in their responses. The more planning involved and the more strictly the interviewer sticks to an interview schedule (with a list of questions phrased in advance and possibly a list of follow-up prompts/questions), the more structured the interview tends to be. A structured interview in this case can be likened to a questionnaire conducted in a face-to-face oral format. It is worth noting that according to Bryman (2016), semi-structured and unstructured interviews refer to two extremes and that in practice there is a wide spectrum between them where different interview settings can exhibit different levels of structure. However, they are

sometimes ‘referred to collectively as *in-depth interviews* or as *qualitative interviews*’ (Bryman, 2016: 468 italics in original).

The interviews referred to in this study are semi-structured, where the interviewer brings in to the conversation some tools (in this case selected sacred texts from the participant’s holy book) to engage in an open conversation with the interviewee. The interviewer in this case is open for almost all directions that the discussion may lead to. He or she asks follow-up questions when necessary (without having a pre-arranged list of questions to pose or topics to cover before the interview session).

Another way to categorise interviews is based on the number of participants and/or the interviewers. Interviews can be conducted with individual participants, couples (can be called pair interviews or joint interviews), or groups (can be called in this case focus groups). The purposes differ and go beyond the practicality of interviewing more people in the same time slot because the dynamics can be different when more than one person is being interviewed in the same session (Finch et al., 2014; Lewis and McNaughton Nicholls, 2014).

In some cases, more than one interviewer can conduct the interview (whether with one interviewee, a couple or a group). This can increase the inter-researcher confirmability (or reliability) as more than one interviewer (and perhaps data analyst) can produce a more robust understanding of what the interviewee(s) meant. If the interviewers take notes (instead of, for example, video-recording the interview), having more than one interviewer can be logistically helpful in freeing up one to ask and listen while the other takes notes, and then they can switch, which can be more productive (but again may present a different dynamic in the interview setting).

The interviews referred to here in this study are one-to-one interviews. Participants were invited to be interviewed individually, and only the author interviewed each participant.

Interviews can also be categorised based on the medium they are conducted in: face-to-face interviews, phone interviews, and video-conferencing (for example, via Skype) interviews.

There are also walking interviews where participants are followed through their working environment while the interviewer asks questions and discusses the setting with the participant (Evans and Jones, 2011). The interviews that differ in the medium used differ in some practicalities and issues around access, ease of administration, flexibility and logistics. They can also differ in terms of the perceived anonymity of the interviewee and the amount of control given to the interviewee (more so in walking interviews, for example). This study refers to mainly face-to-face interviews and some Skype interviews (mainly for practical reasons, for example, with participants living abroad).

2.6.2 High-quality interviews

In concluding one of their chapters titled 'The Responsive Interview as an Extended Conversation', Rubin and Rubin (2012: 114) summarise the features of what 'a good interview' is:

> 'How do you know you have done a good interview? Things are going well when you are getting thoughtful and detailed answers. Better yet, interviews are working when the conversational partners point out subtleties or suggest new themes to you. When conversational partners reach out, touch your shoulder, say, "it was fun," and invite you back, you know that the interview succeeded. Finally, you know that the interviews are working when you feel absorbed and excited as you reread your transcripts or notes and have a strong desire to share what you have learned with others.'

Rubin and Rubin (2012: 101) maintain that research interviewers adopting the responsive interview model 'are looking for material that has depth and detail and is nuanced and rich with vivid thematic material.'

Following are some criteria that the literature discusses to assess the richness and/or depth as well as the authenticity of the data constructed in social research interviews. It is worth noting that the following descriptions are not the only ones the author will be looking for in the data (i.e. *a priori*). Rather, the data will perhaps suggest other dynamics and/or themes, which in turn can result in the amendment of and the adding to such codes in the process. This is what Wellington and Szczerbinski (2007: 106) describe as a mixture of both *a priori*

(predefined) and *a posteriori* (emerging) categories to look at the data. In their view, this is 'the most common and … the most rational approach to analysing qualitative data.' They maintain that

> '[e]xisting categories, derived from past research and previous literature, can be brought to the data and used to make sense of it. But frequently there will be new data which require new thought and new categorization.'

As far as high-quality interviews are concerned, the literature seems to suggest three angles that are not necessarily mutually exclusive. They, though, can focus the attention in this research on the nature of the dynamics (Research Objectives 1 and 2) of as well as the content (Research Objective 3) resulting from the social research interviews. The three angles are: the genuineness of each interview, the richness of the data gathered across all interviews, and the depth of the output.

2.6.2.1 Genuine output in the face-to-face interview as one entity

Genuineness can be understood to refer to the authenticity or naturalness in the interview. It answers a set of questions:

(1) *Does the conversation seem to run like a casual conversation?* Lofland (1971: 90) maintains that 'successful interviewing is not unlike carrying on unthreatening, self-controlled, supportive, polite, and cordial interaction in everyday life,' and Oppenheim (1992: 67) is of the opinion that in-depth interviews should have spontaneity as their primary goal, where interviewees carry what Oppenheim described as 'a continuous monologue' which the interviewer from time to time punctuates with signs that he or she is following while it is mainly the interviewee who is doing most of the talking.

(2) *Is the interviewee honest?* Are there some cues and clues in the data that may suggest that the interviewee shared honestly what was on their mind in that setting?

(3) *Was it generally perceived as a pleasant and enjoyable experience by the interviewee and the interviewer?*

Based on the literature, following is a discussion of features that could be listened for in the data to establish whether the output is genuine or not:

– Talking about emotions: It is more likely a discussion is genuine when the interviewees talk about how they feel or felt in a life event to which they refer (McHugh, 2015). Genuineness of the interaction can also be seen in the interviewer's emotional reaction (Ezzy, 2010). Gemignani's (2011) theme of counter-transference is the emotional effect of the patient (in counselling) (but can be understood in a research interview setting too) on the counsellor (the researcher in this case). Paying attention to those unpredicted emotional observations, surprises, shocks, etc. may add some richness to the data collected (Hubbard et al., 2001) and can lead to a more sensitive approach to interviewing. Gemignani maintains that 'if embraced and addressed, the researcher's emotional reactions can be an important source of reflexivity and data as well as creativity, motivation, and engagement' (p. 701). Risky as it is, counter-transference provides 'the potential for personal engagements, heartfelt interpretations, collections of complex data, and nuanced analyses,' and this 'well-justifies the risk' (Gemignani 2011: 707).

– Telling personal stories, examples or narratives: Mishler (1991: 106), commenting on the appearance of stories and narratives in interview responses, maintains that this 'supports the view of some theorists that narratives are one of the natural cognitive and linguistic forms through which individuals attempt to order, organize, and express meaning.' Rubin and Rubin (2012) too point out that while they have not based any of their projects solely on stories, narratives give the interviews some richness, and that researchers could look for 'secondary messages' in the stories told. In a casual conversation, speakers may use storytelling as a tool to communicate certain attitudes, values, or beliefs, sometimes perhaps more importantly than the factual side of the story (especially when the story is told as an example that can serve as an economical way to communicate something beyond the detailed events). Narratives can also be perceived to constitute important parts of one's identity and how life and other actors are seen (McAdams and McLean, 2013).

Examples, according to Rubin and Rubin (2012), illustrate the meaning of an event. Narratives tell what the person believes happened, while stories are polished versions of narratives; they are usually narratives that have been told several times that they take a fixed form. Rubin and Rubin maintain that responsive interviews share the occurrences of examples, stories and narratives with ordinary conversations.

The stories that the interviewees tell can serve as an economical way to 'communicate experience, ideas and emotions' (Gabriel and Connell, 2010: 507) and can also be analysed for some 'secondary messages' that can reflect the interviewee's attitudes, beliefs, and values (Rubin and Rubin, 2012: 29). They can also reflect a natural setting like that of a casual conversation. Mishler (1991: 69) maintains that it is not unusual 'for interviewees to respond to questions with narratives if they are given some room to speak.'

– Asking the interviewer for his or her opinion (as would naturally be the case in a casual conversation where the dialogue is two-directional):

Abell and Myers (2008: 154) maintain that interviews are not 'impersonal encounters with someone with a clipboard collecting information: they are informal talks over a cup of tea, and the participants carefully maintain – and enjoy – the experience of chatting.' This means that if participants are generally comfortable with and enjoying the discussion, some 'reversal of roles' (Abell and Myers, 2008: 155) may take place, where an interviewee may in fact ask the interviewer for their opinion. Moreover, if the interview setting mimics a casual conversation, the interviewer may feel comfortable to share his or her own ideas as 'logical alternatives' to what the interviewee has said (Rubin and Rubin, 2012: 106). Rubin and Rubin maintain that such practice may increase the richness of the interview data since it provides the interviewee with a chance to possibly elaborate more and/or reflect on another angle suggested by the interviewer. Rubin and Rubin (2012: 73) advise interviewers to 'expose a bit of [themselves]' if a personal natural responsive interview is the target.

– Participants giving interviewers information that they know the interviewer does not know:

Abell and Myers (2008) also maintain that sometimes the 'gap' between the interviewer and the interviewee can work favourably and may result in a more natural discussion. The gap here doesn't refer to the lack of information about the participant's life (which is usually the case in most interviews, hence the need to interview people), but it is the lack of some knowledge in life (be it knowledge about types of cars, a political situation, rules of golf, etc.). In this case, a Christian interviewer, interviewing Muslim participants, may not be expected to understand everything about Islam. This means that Muslim interviewees can, then, educate the interviewer on some concepts not known to him or her.

In this case, some genuine or perceived ignorance on the side of the interviewer may allow for some elaboration on the interviewee's side so that the full picture can be comprehended by the interviewer. This elaboration can in fact provide some thinking patterns or an interpretive repertoire that can help understand more about the interviewee from the way s/he explains things. The way one explains concepts known to them may reveal more than the concept *per se*; it can reveal other patterns, values, and attitudes.

Using sacred texts can lend itself to this positive gap in knowledge (on the part of the interviewer) and can, thus, provide for a good platform where the interviewee (in this case, an expert in comparison to the less-informed interviewer) can articulate and elaborate on his/her understanding of their own faith while illuminating the interviewer. The interviewee in this case will have all the freedom to talk about their belief without the fear that he or she may be imposing on their listener of a different background (the researcher in this case). Such an opportunity may not always present itself for faith followers who may think twice before sharing their faith beliefs with someone from a different background; the research interview setting in this case facilitates this talk with ease giving the needed legitimacy with an information gap.

Another thing that this notion can help with is that it opens the door for themes unknown to the researcher to surface and be elaborated on and perhaps further investigated. Such an

option may not always be there when researchers mainly investigate things ‘they know about’ or ‘they know that they don’t know’.

– Commenting about their comfort in the discussion: If interviewees comment saying that they enjoyed the discussion, or they would like it to carry on, or ‘it was fun’ (Rubin and Rubin, 2012: 114). An enjoyable discussion can mean that the interviewee not only benefited the interviewer with some information, but that he or she also gained some cognitive effects (Sperber and Wilson, 2004).

– Saying ‘I don’t know’: In saying ‘I don’t know’, a participant may follow that by thinking about the topic perhaps for the first time. It could also indicate that one usually thinks things over by speaking them. It is worth referring to the role of language in Social Constructionism where language is used to construct (rather than simply describe) one’s thoughts. While merely saying ‘I don’t know’ does not necessarily indicate the genuineness of the discussion, it may point to the absence of pre-arranged responses or idealistic answers (that can be seen in job interviews, for example, or other less natural conversations). In Oppenheim’s (1992: 68-69) words, ‘it is *spontaneous* reactions that are wanted, not carefully thought out positions’ [italics in original].

Saying ‘I don’t know’ can also be seen to indicate the participant’s comfort in the dialogue where they are not under the pressure to produce an answer (even with the right presumption that they want to help the interviewer).

– If there are some instances of laughter in the interview:

Laughter in interviews could be taken to mean that both interviewer and interviewee are comfortable around each other and with the discussion. In this case, and as Glenn (2003) maintained, laughter is not to be considered simply a response but as an integral part of the dynamics of the interaction.

– If there is some digression (that the interviewee is aware of and seems to apologetically acknowledge): Rubin and Rubin (2012: 180) maintain that when the participants change the direction of the discussion, it is most probably because the new direction is more important to them. If a participant is comfortable enough to change the direction of the discussion, it is probably a direction they are more interested in talking about. Bryman (2016: 466) believes that 'in qualitative interviewing, 'rambling' or going off at tangents is often encouraged – it gives insight into what the interviewee sees as relevant and important.'

– If the interviewee 'is on a roll' (Rubin and Rubin, 2012: 127) and indicates, perhaps apologetically, that he or she has been talking for too long. Rubin and Rubin suggest in this case that the interviewee should not be interrupted by a follow-up question. Oppenheim (1992: 67) advises interviewers that a 'continuous monologue' produced by an interviewee should only be 'punctuated' with nodding and conversation fillers encouraging the interviewee to carry on. Talking for relatively longer than one thinks appropriate may suggest that one is comfortable with the conversational setting and/or that one is interested in the topic. On the other hand, short answers may indicate either a poor design (yes/no questions, etc. as warned by Rubin and Rubin, 2012 and McHugh, 2015) or the lack of enthusiasm on the part of the interviewee.

2.6.2.2 Rich output across several interviews

Data richness can be understood to refer to the 'breadth' of the range of data gathered in the social research interview setting. Whether the interviews output is rich or not can be indicated by answering the following set of questions:

(1) *Is there a range of responses among different participants to the same prompt, spanning a variety of issues?*

(2) *Are there what could be fine differences (or nuances) across different interviews?*

Based on the literature, following is a discussion of some features that could be listened for in the data to establish whether the output is rich:

– The presence of various themes across cultures, age groups, different personal circumstances, etc.:

Rubin and Rubin (2012) maintain that '[i]nterviewees' answers are rich if they present many related themes' which will reflect in the report as having 'a density of ideas' (p. 69) or 'numerous themes' that a researcher can explore further (p. 106). They suggest that asking interviewees to provide examples can result in such richness because examples can bring in different aspects of the topic discussed. They also seem to suggest that richness is a quality that features across several interviews, and perhaps that is why they recommend 'seek[ing] complementary, overlapping, as well as contradictory versions from people with different viewpoints' (p. 69).

– The presence of 'yes and no' or 'yes, but' or equally 'no, but' answers (showing a range of possibilities rather than a black/white attitude) in the same interview (Rubin and Rubin, 2012: 29). This may show the presence of some shades of meanings and the awareness of the interviewees of the complexity of some social phenomena.

– The presence of 'examples, (…) experiences, (…) narratives and stories' (Rubin and Rubin, 2012: 29). This is how Rubin and Rubin describe 'rich and detailed information' that a researcher should seek, rather than 'agree-or-disagree responses.'

2.6.2.3 Deep output

The depth of the output can be taken to refer to the nature of the content of the data gathered in the interview and the extent to which they are not superficial but insightful; not shallow but multi-layered. Whether the interviews output is deep or not can be indicated by answering the following set of questions:

(1) *Are the responses elaborated upon and developed to reach some insights?*

(2) *Is there some evidence of analysis done by the participant during the interview?*

(3) *Is there some evidence that participants reach some insights new to them during the discussion?*

Based on the literature, following is a discussion of some features that could be listened for in the data to establish whether the output is deep:

– Participants giving details:

Details are a sign of good interviews (Hermanowicz, 2002) as they usually give a clearer or more elaborate picture of what one means. They usually answer the 'What' and 'How' questions (Rubin and Rubin, 2012: 103) and can perhaps communicate more layers of what the interviewee wants to share. In Rubin and Rubin's (2012: 104) words, '[d]etail adds solidity, clarity, evidence, and example; depth adds layers of meaning, different angles on the subject, and understanding.' In prompting more details of the metaphor mentioned by an interviewee, the Clean Language approach provides clients with some deeper understanding of themselves through the metaphors they use (Sullivan and Rees, 2011).

– Participants giving reasons:

Rubin and Rubin (2012) maintain that while details answer the 'what and how', depth, on the other hand, is found in answers to the 'why' question. (However, Dana et al. (1992) warn against the explicit use of the question wording 'why', and Rubin and Rubin warn against it too because it is 'too abstract for most people to answer' (p. 167) and suggest other phrasing such as 'What led to that?' and 'what happened to make you do that?' and 'what contributed to that?' (p. 139 and p. 167) and other questions that may seek reasons.) When participants mention reasons for preferring to do something, they go beyond what is socially or religiously accepted but they show their rationale, which in itself can open a deeper area in the discussion.

– Participants saying that they learned something or thought about something for the first time:

Wellington and Szczerbinski (2007) advise that writing (in research contexts) should not be the last stage where the researchers write what they already know. They maintain that writing itself is a form of thinking to create some understanding. The same can be applied to speaking and conversing; it is in thinking aloud using the tools available for the participant during the interview (the excerpts from their sacred book) that can lead the interviewee to sharpen and fine-tune, or perhaps create, their opinions in their course to construct their world.

The following discussion recaps the general qualities that make sacred texts promising as interview-enhancing tools in social research based on the previously discussed notions.

2.7 Qualities of sacred texts that make them promising as enhancing tools in social research interviews

From the discussion throughout this chapter, it can be argued at least initially in theory that extracts of sacred texts have some promising potential as enhancing tools in social research interviews. The following list summarises the qualities of sacred texts, some of which are shared with other prompts used in research interviews and others are unique to sacred texts. The list of these qualities points out the need to empirically examine the possibility of the fruitful use of sacred texts to enhance research interviews (which is the empirical part of this research as detailed later), hence the gap in the social research interview literature.

The qualities are divided into sections based on the main aspects and criteria of sacred texts.

2.7.1 Authenticity

a. Sacred texts have been around for a long time, and they have stood the test of time. Their existence for purposes other than research purposes points at their authenticity as real-life texts. Their translations into several languages have also been around for a considerable amount of time.

b. Sacred texts are (perceived to be) authentic (as opposed to badly/well translated research instruments). This means that they are perceived to be real utterances in comparison with hypothetical interview questions (such as vignettes (Barter and Renold, 1999; Bradbudy-Jones et al., 2014), for example). Faith groups discuss their sacred texts in a range of religious practices, which makes discussing religious texts a common rather than artificial social activity of faith followers, increasing their ecological validity when used in social research. The fact that they have existed since long before the researcher's decision to design interview questions makes them less culturally influenced by the researcher's perceptions and background. This increases their neutrality or transculturality as research tools.

2.7.2 Linguistic accuracy

c. Because these texts are perceived to be sacred by their relevant faith followers, a lot of effort, care, and time have been (and are being) put into translating them (The Word for the World, 2017; Wycliffe Bible Translators, 2017), which can guarantee translation accuracy and meaningfulness, to a great extent. For research purposes, the rigour in translating questions does not come close to that exercised in translating sacred texts. The 'bias' (or at least the angle) that one's language can have in his or her understanding and perception of the world has been maintained by some theorists (Whorf, 1997). The use of a tool such as a sacred text may decrease some of the problematic nature of researcher-designed texts that could suffer from some unintentional bias.

2.7.3 Sacredness

d. They perhaps assume a more authoritative/credible position when compared with other texts. This means respondents will be more likely to give more attention to them and more honest responses in an interview setting using those texts.

2.7.4 Familiarity

e. They have been translated into other languages allowing faith followers to understand the original text. Faith followers, therefore, identify with the text in their language (and sometimes in their favourite translation(s)) as their own (The Word for the World, 2017). This familiarity with the text is one of the main promising features that can make its use in social research fruitful.

f. Respondents have the possibility of access to the sacred texts (if they are practising Christians/Muslims) over a long time in other natural settings long before the research interview setting. Their access also takes a lot of shapes and forms (such as TV programmes, conventions and conferences, books of interpretation, and even debates on social media). This makes the data gathered in interviews more relevant as they reflect attitudes, thoughts, and ideas bounced off some familiar texts. The informants could, in some cases, have had similar discussions around the same (or similar) verses and have had enough opportunities to form their opinions way before the time of the interview. This means that some mental context(s) has(ve) already been developed to cognitively process the utterances, which, according to Relevance Theory (Sperber and Wilson, 2004), increases accessibility to relevant contexts.

g. Faith followers are not only (expected to be) familiar with the wording of the prompt, but it is also common to refer to religious texts to discuss, defend, or criticise social issues. Most if not all religions have the need to mention, explain, and sometimes debate sacred texts in order for the followers to do and/or understand what the religious teachings tell them.

Discussions around religious topics are not limited to preaching to those who are outside of faith; it does include preaching to the converted literally. Church meetings and Friday prayers are replete with examples where some texts are talked about and discussed to strengthen people's faith or to challenge some misunderstandings or to discuss some current affairs from a religious lens. This means that faith followers would be familiar with using some verses from their holy books in a social discussion. This makes the research

interview a genuine setting (increasing its ecological validity (Bryman, 2016)) rather than an alien situation where some ‘made-up’ questions (and possibly answers) are used. Creative as they could be, some hypothetical research scenarios (such as vignettes) may lead to data that cannot be fully trusted as genuine, i.e. in real situations, respondents may resort to some other course(s) of action.

h. Sacred texts are not imposed on followers of faith (as participants in research) (compared to using maps, poetry and stories, for example) since there is an inherent sense of ownership of the holy book that contains the text once one subscribes to the relevant faith. The amount and degree of investment that one can put into understanding the text in their real life can justify the expectation of some meaningful discussions if such texts are used in social research interviews. (It can be further argued that the same applies to some atheists who may strongly oppose religious beliefs. This may seem paradoxical, but it could be argued that the emotional attachment to the text (whether by revering or detesting it) can produce some meaningful (and possibly heated) discussions. After all, atheists who are strongly and openly against religious beliefs do sometimes invest a significant amount of their time and effort in refuting, debating or simply attacking the religious texts. Such investment can guarantee some context(s) that can be prompted if the same texts are used in research interviews to springboard and sustain the discussion. Of course, ethical issues should be considered so that their participation in discussions involving texts they do not revere (yet know, refute, debate, and possibly attack) is voluntary and that their informed consent is obtained (Oliver, 2003).)

2.7.5 Public and personal nature

i. Sacred texts can serve as a point of focus during the interview process. This allows more flexibility and face-saving if a participant does not want to answer a personal question. In this case they have the sacred text (not the interviewee) in the spotlight. The fact that the text is not only personal carries this possibility if a participant wants to opt for the general meaning behind a certain passage. (Such a feature may not be available in photo-elicitation

where a participant brings in their own photographs and may find themselves obliged to talk about them.)

j. The public/personal nature of sacred texts can allow for the use of sacred texts as interview-enhancing tools in a comparative capacity (for example, across different age groups, nationalities, professions, cultures, etc.). A sacred text carries a public nature (as it could be transcultural or pancultural) and at the same time a personal nature as individual believers of the faith subscribe individually to the text and can find some resonance in it. The etic (public) and emic (personal) dual nature (Harris, 1976) of the sacred text as a research tool may enhance the quality of data gathered in interviews due to the public starting point of a transcultural text that is not designed by the researcher and as a result not necessarily influenced by his or her culture. Sacred texts seem to exhibit both features, and therefore they carry the local sensitivity (with the personal assent to the faith) and the universal acceptance (being shared globally in religious circles).

2.7.6 Wide range of subscription and of the social issues covered by the texts

k. Sacred texts are perceived by the relevant followers to cover almost all social and personal aspects of life. This can be used to investigate social phenomena and other life activities. They are widely shared and are not limited in their scope to special situations, institutionalised use, or specialised settings (although certain passages can serve in these capacities too). This makes them a versatile tool in a lot of social sciences disciplines and domains such as social psychology, studies of cultures, ethics, personal and social relations, communication, etc. The intertwining nature of religion and the society (Tarakeshwar et al., 2003) provides some justification in linking discussions of the social sphere to some sacred writings and teachings.

l. Sacred texts are perceived to have audiences across different social strata, age groups, genders, and different statuses. This allows for their wide use among different social

groups, perhaps with very little needed knowledge about the participant before embarking on the interview.

m. Sacred texts are subscribed to and owned by those who believe in them regardless of nationality. This point may balance the 'Western bias' in a lot of research instruments where questionnaire items or research topics may be biased towards Western practices, features, or possessions (Wong and Poon, 2010; Gobo, 2011) (resulting in wording or themes which may exist in other cultures but carry different connotations.) The fact that Christianity and Islam, for example, are referred to in much of the literature as 'Western religions' (as opposed to Eastern religions such as Buddhism) is telling (Schwartz and Huismans, 1995). The West has identified with the faiths to the extent that it considered them theirs, even with the explicit acknowledgment that these faiths started in the Middle East. This is held true by the followers of faiths who subscribe to their holy books rendering the texts readily relevant and welcomed.

n. Followers of faiths tend to have some insights even on some sections of the sacred texts that do not directly relate to them in their current situations (for example: single people can be expected to comment on passages on marriage as the text can still be relevant and carry some resonance for every Christian/Muslim).

o. There are some similar themes spanning different sacred texts (such as dealing respectfully with others, giving to the poor, working hard, honouring parents, the value of justice, mercy, honesty, etc.). This makes them readily usable in social research (across different faiths) as they are not restricted to some limited themes excluding a wide range of others. A practical example is what is known as Scriptural Reasoning, which is currently practised globally (Ford, 2006). In Scriptural Reasoning, people of different faiths (namely Muslims, Christians and Jews) meet around one theme, and each can bring their own scripture that tackles that theme. The discussion is said to increase people's understanding of the other and deepen each one's understanding of his or her scripture.

2.7.7 The possibility of the repeated use

p. While some other creative research interview-enhancing tools may lose their novelty once used with participants in one piece of research, sacred texts seem to maintain their freshness as springboards for social discussions. The fact that subscribers to the text do, in their spiritual activities, engage in discussions revolving around their sacred books makes the reuse of (perhaps different) verses possible. Meditating on even the same verse(s) is a known technique in many faiths where the general belief is that sacred texts are so rich that they can always speak to the believer with sometimes fresh insights even from memorised verses. Ford (2006: 345) describes such richness with the phrase the 'superabundance of meaning.' The repeated use of sacred texts as a technique to enhance a dialogue is not hindered by any secrets or tricks in the technique that would be given away once used.

Before embarking on the empirical study that examines such an assumption, the following section summarises the theoretical underpinning of the conceptual framework drawn upon to justify such an assumption.

2.8 Theoretical assumptions supporting the use of sacred texts as tools to enhance social research interviews – A summary

This section presents a summary of the discussion around the theoretical possibility of using sacred texts as tools to enhance social research interviews. It links the theories and frameworks discussed throughout the chapter with the specific need to empirically examine the use of sacred texts in the above-mentioned capacity. The main theories and conceptual frameworks that are brought together in the following discussion are linked to Social Constructionism, Relevance Theory, qualitative interviewing and sacred texts.

An enhanced interview, for the purpose of the current discussion, aims at a flowing conversation that can produce rich and varied data, and, therefore, can be defined as an

interviewee-centred interviewee-empowering dialogue contextualised in interviewee-relevant themes.

According to Social Constructionism, in Burr's (1999: 113) words, language is seen 'as constructive rather than descriptive of the world,' which can mean that in order to construct one's world, a discussion that uses natural language is needed where people not only voice out their opinions but also create such opinions in the course of a dialogue. Therefore, in-depth interviews can be seen to provide such a platform where the world of participants can be 'spoken into existence' in a dialogue environment.

The literature on qualitative interviewing, therefore, has a lot to say on the criteria for high-quality interviews. One main criterion is the need for an interview setting to mimic an 'extended conversation' (Rubin and Rubin, 2012: 95) through an interested researcher that engages his or her participants in discussions around topics of interest and resonance to the informants' worlds. To achieve this, discussions carried out in such interview settings need to satisfy certain qualities of relatedness to cater for the needs of participants not only researchers. Hence, Relevance Theory is consulted to build on its assumptions on how communication and cognition take place in natural settings.

According to Relevance Theory (Sperber and Wilson, 2004), utterances in natural conversations are expected to satisfy the requirement of relevance (informativeness or relatedness) to the hearer (the participant) in terms of its form (to attract their attention) and content (to justify the needed mental processing effort that results in some cognitive gain to the hearer). While Relevance Theory considers the efforts on the side of the speaker (in his or her production of the utterance), the focus is on the hearer and their expectations of relevance. Based on this, it is argued that sacred texts carry a degree of relevance to hearers if they follow the faith from whose holy book the texts are taken. The emotional attachment to one's faith (and as a possible result to one's sacred teachings and texts) justifies the expectation that, when used in a social discussion, sacred texts can provide

utterances relevant to the participant, who can then engage in a discussion that seems meaningful to them. This way, the discussion can mimic an extended conversation of a real-life dialogue.

To conclude, in order to investigate the 'reality' of participants in a piece of research (in the subjective sense of reality, as suggested by the interpretive paradigm), there is a need for engaging them in an extended conversation that mimics a natural dialogue (Rubin and Rubin, 2012) where they can, along with their interlocutor, create such a reality (Finlay, 2002; Gubrium and Holstein, 2002; Webster et al., 2014). In order for such a natural extended conversation to take place in a social research interview setting, some fulfilment of the Relevance Theory (Sperber and Wilson, 2004) assumptions concerning the qualities of utterances used and the expectations of some relevance in their forms and content needs to be achieved. To achieve that, the lookout is for utterances or texts to which participants can relate. Sacred texts seem to satisfy this criterion among other criteria from a social research viewpoint (such as their robust translation processes, and their coverage of a wide range of social themes among many other criteria discussed in section 2.7).

The above argument has made the case for the theoretical potential of using sacred texts as enhancing tools in research interviews. Since sacred texts up to this point in the literature have not been (investigated for the possibility to be) added to the toolbox of enhancing tools that can be used fruitfully in research interviews, the need is there to empirically examine the benefits and challenges of their use, hence this research.

The following chapter (Methodology) details how the tool has been used to empirically examine the benefits and challenges of using texts from the Bible and from the Quran to interview some Christians and Muslims from different backgrounds.

Chapter 3 Methodology

The purpose of this empirical research is to examine the initial assumption that sacred texts can be fruitfully used to enhance social research interviews dynamics to yield rich and deep data. To empirically examine this initial assumption, this research has been designed to provide a vehicle through which such an assumption can be examined in a real piece of research inquiry. The details of choices made for this research are given in this chapter.

It is worth noting here that the specifics of this empirical piece of research (such as the choice of holy books, the verses used, the number of participants, the length of the interviews and other decisions) are to serve certain purposes explained in this chapter. If sacred texts are proven useful as tools in social research interviews, the specifics may differ in other pieces of research depending on several issues such as the area of investigation or the practical access to participants, among other things.

3.1 An overall summary of the research process

In this qualitative study, three parallel sets of verses taken from each of two holy books (the Bible and the Quran) were used in a total of 28 one-to-one semi-structured interviews with participants of different nationalities. Each semi-structured interview lasted between 38 and 140 minutes (an average of 83 minutes) with a total of 38.8 hours of interview data. The sets of verses were selected so that they may seem contrasting in nature. The participants' age ranged from 18 to 63 and were 15 females and 13 males who were recruited via purposive sampling. Data were analysed for themes raised in the interviews as well as for the dynamics of the process of using sacred texts in that setting in line with the three research objectives (described in Chapter 1).

3.2 Research paradigm

This research sits within the interpretive paradigm (Walliman, 2005) seeking to gain more understanding of and insights into the participants' worlds.

The interpretive paradigm is built on a set of basic beliefs and assumptions, and, according to Burrell and Morgan (2005), it is situated as the intersection between the subjective dimension and the sociology of regulation. As a paradigm that belongs to the subjective camp, the interpretive paradigm assumes that 'reality' or rather realities are not out there outside of the observer. Therefore, the background, attitudes, beliefs, and thoughts of the researcher will have some bearing on the way he or she sees the world. This matches what has been described in previous sections about the interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee in an extended dialogue-like research interview setting. This contrasts with the functionalist paradigm which may share the sociology of regulation with the interpretive paradigm but differs in terms of its 'objective' look to reality where the researcher needs to be as removed or detached from it to see 'clearly' and 'without bias.'

As far as objectivity is concerned, Burr (2001: 160) maintains that '[n]o human being can step outside of her or his humanity and view the world from no position at all, which is what the idea of objectivity suggests, and this is just as true of scientists as of everyone else.'

The interpretive paradigm is also based on the belief in the sociology of regulation where the studies that sit in this paradigm usually look at the society in its status quo. The interpretive paradigm is not primarily interested in conflict or radical change (in which other paradigms such as the Radical Humanist and the Radical Structuralist are interested) (Burrell and Morgan, 2005). So, in a nutshell, the interpretive paradigm whose worldview the author shares, and in which this study sits, holds the basic assumptions that research, realities, and society are subjective and are to be seen, perceived, and studied with this in mind.

The rigour of research, therefore, is defined not by how detached the observer is but how conscious he or she is of their inevitable involvement. In Burrell and Morgan's (2005: 28) words,

> '[t]he interpretive paradigm is informed by a concern to understand the world as it is, to understand the fundamental nature of the social world at the level of subjective experience. It seeks explanation within the realm of individual consciousness and subjectivity, within the frame of reference of the participant as opposed to the observer of action.'

This is particularly the case when the research instrument is semi-structured interviews where co-construction of knowledge through the active participation of both interviewer and interviewee is expected (Finlay, 2002; Gubrium and Holstein, 2002; Webster et al., 2014). It is even more so if the type of interviewing experience sought is that of an extended conversation (Rubin and Rubin, 2012) that mimics everyday dialogues where both interviewer and interviewee bring to the discussion their worldviews.

Personal Reflection

I am aware of the fact that I, the researcher, was born and raised in Egypt, speak both Arabic and English, am a Christian who has lived for more than 30 years in a dominantly-Muslim country. This combination of background, belief system, understanding of Arabic and having some understanding of Islam justifies my interest in this particular research and the choices made, but it also undoubtedly affects the way I approach, select and analyse my data.

I also wonder how I am to be perceived by my participants and what it means to them for me to be a Christian who lived in a dominantly-Muslim country, for example. I am aware that I may relate more to some participants who may seem to share circles of identity similar to mine.

In an interpretive paradigm, no Truth (with a capital T) is sought; rather more in-depth understanding of how meanings are shared, constructed, and expressed. With this in mind, the trustworthiness (a term used by Lincoln and Guba, 1985) of data, analysis, and the whole research product may not depend on criteria typical of the ones used in a positivist paradigm. Holt (1991: 61) even criticises some of the criteria offered by Lincoln and Guba and maintains that it should be the 'insightfulness' of the interpretation that is the criterion based on which the readers can decide for themselves (based on their experiences) whether to 'trust' the research. This is not to exclude the various common techniques adopted by qualitative studies sitting in the interpretive paradigm to ensure the rigour of the whole process of research. With this acknowledgment of subjectivity, researchers working within the interpretive paradigm 'monitor', rather than deny, the impact they may have on the research they conduct (Rubin and Rubin, 2012: 17).

Personal Reflection

Here are some of the different aspects to my identity which can help the reader know more about me and to what extent I could be an insider, outsider, a mixture of both in some cases with some interviewees. As part of my reflection before and after each interview, I questioned which side of my identity overlapped or was against that of my interviewee, knowing that I am more than an interviewer (Nunkoosing, 2005). After all, I am more than a male Egyptian who was born and raised in Upper Egypt. I bring to each interview setting a combination of different parts of me: a trained dentist, of 37 years of age, Christian, living in the UK, into music and translation, a blogger, speak Arabic and English, among other things.

It is understandable that identity is not a static construct; it is not only dynamic but it is interactive too. In Paltridge's (2012: 24) words, '[p]art of having a certain identity is that it is recognised by other people. Identity, thus, is a two-way construction.' *Part of my thinking process to assess my participants' responses and the dynamics of our interviews is the fact that each participant 'saw' me or part of me in terms of their identity (or part thereof). Me being a Christian was not enough for one participant (Feysal, Muslim British, 30) who suggested that I should tell my subsequent participants of my being a 'Coptic' Christian (and*

not just a Christian). He went on to explain that a Coptic Christian means a Christian native of Egypt and not a Muslim Egyptian who converted to Christianity when he came to the UK.

The interpretive paradigm entails that the interaction in the interviews themselves could (and will) be different if another researcher carries the same piece of research (Finlay, 2002), and clearly if a different set of interviewees was approached. Far from objectivity (in the conventional sense of the word) which is described by Lincoln and Guba (1985) to be a theoretically impossible target to achieve, this study acknowledges the 'perspectival' view (Schwartz and Ogilvy, 1979: 15 cited in Lincoln and Guba, 1985) of the author reflected in the choice of the research topic, sampling, and possibly the analysis of the data collected. Meaning is created via the interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee where both bring in some knowledge (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000: 11) to create their world(s) at that moment in time. This is likened to the metaphor of a traveller (as opposed to a miner) introduced by Kvale and Brinkmann (2009: 48) in their discussion of different approaches to qualitative interviews. A traveller interacts with the new places and goes back home with personal memories and observations of places that could be seen differently by other travellers. Interviewees had been told of this approach prior to the interviews with the aim of providing them with what to expect. This does not rule out the systematic rigorous nature of the inquiry nor does it imply the exclusion of best practices known in the field of qualitative research. The Hegelian description 'objectively subjective' could perhaps reflect where the author is coming from in an interpretive study (Lincoln and Guba, 1985: 103).

There is no claim to generalisability here especially in terms of the thematic material in the interview data; however, some insights into the use of sacred texts in interviews may shed some light on its benefits and challenges, which can be widely transferable in similar-purpose research if the methodological approach proves worth it. It is believed that it is the applier's responsibility to check for context similarities when attempting to apply (or

generalise, or rather transfer) the knowledge gained from one research to other places, cultures, situations, populations, etc. (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

3.3 Research design

This research is conducted using a qualitative method which is generally more suitable (than quantitative methods) in this kind of interpretive research inquiry (Wellington and Szczerbinski, 2007). Qualitative methods are 'more sensitive to and adaptable to the many mutually shaping influences and value patterns that may be encountered' (Lincoln and Guba, 1985: 40).

It is usually the aim in qualitative studies that such in-depth interviews will yield rich data that can be analysed for themes to use in reconstructing the interviewee's realities (Miller and Glassner, 2011).

3.4 Selection of holy books and verses

Certain decisions were made in this empirical research to gain some understanding of the dynamics of and the content produced by interviews where sacred texts are used as enhancing tools. Following are the detailed choices made and the rationale behind each.

3.4.1 Holy books and translation versions

The Bible and the Quran are the two holy books used in this research. The author, as a Christian, has access to the Bible, and having lived in a Muslim-majority country, he also has some familiarity with the Quran. Speaking Arabic makes the Quran more accessible in its original form (in Classical Arabic).

It was decided to use two holy books rather than only one. The differences between the Bible and the Quran (and perhaps between the Christian and Islamic teachings) allow some room for some deeper insights into the findings in this study. After all, it could be that one book (or one set of beliefs) lends itself to richer, freer or more natural discussions in

interview settings in comparison to other teachings; therefore, it was worth using both holy books to examine whether there is anything specific to the book, rather than the technique, that makes it usable in social research interviews.

The Bible verses were selected from the New International Version (NIV, 2011) (for English speakers) and the Van Dyke (for Arabic speakers). The Quranic verses were taken from the original Quran version (the Holy Quran in Classical Arabic) and from the English translation of the noble Quran (by Al-Hilali and Khan, 1996). In all cases, interviewees were given the opportunity to use their own favourite translations (on their smart phone applications or the Internet), and some interviewees consulted more than one translation in their process of thinking about the meaning of some verses.

3.4.2 Verses

Verses were selected from the Bible and the Quran in three sets each. Each set of verses is a pair of seemingly-contradictory (contrasting) verses from the same sacred book. The pairs share some similarities across both books. The total number of verses used in this empirical part of the research is twelve (six from each book in three pairs) (printed in two languages: English and Arabic).

Searching for suitable verses to use to enhance interviews proved to be a challenging task. For this empirical part of the research, verses had to meet some criteria: to be social, contrasting, and parallel to the verses from the other holy book. The difficulty of verse selection may differ in other research where other themes are investigated (for example, happiness, success, money, fame, sacrifice, etc.) or other criteria are in place (such as the inclusion of a different holy book or the lack of need for contrasting verses). Four sets were initially selected (including the three used in this research), and a decision was made to exclude the fourth one (a set of verses on wisdom and its value) (Appendix I). It was thought that the three selected sets provide a group of general aspects of social lives that can be applicable to all participants. They fit the three-circle model (dealing with others, honouring

parents, and self-worth) as explained below in section 3.4.2.1. Having more than three sets of verses (six in total in each interview) may not be practically viable (as the interviews in that case may run for over an hour and a half each).

3.4.2.1 Social circles roughly reflected in the three sets of verses

The three sets of verses follow roughly three social circles or contexts. The core circle is self-worth. The next layer circle is the attitudes towards parents, and the outer layer is doing good to others. This simple frame generally includes a considerable part of the social life of almost any given individual in a society of the population (Muslims and Christians). One's self-worth is at the core as the most intimate circle where one meets him- or herself all the time. One's identity and how he or she perceives their worth could affect and be affected by the dynamics in the next circles. The next layer is related to the attitude to parents. While one may not have a wife or children or siblings or uncles, most people in almost all societies either have or have had parents. Orphans 'miss' the feeling, but they generally grow up to understand the existence of the concept that is usually constructed by the society where they live. Parent figures could be around for those who lost their parents or those who need figures different to their biological parents. The outer circle is wider, and it includes others in the society. This can range from others in the neighbourhood, workplace, the whole community, whole nation, or even the world.

It is worth noting that the choice of these sets of verses does not necessarily exclude that other topics can be tapped during the interviews. After all, the verses are to be used as tools to prompt the discussion and also as anchors to sustain the dialogue in a context chosen by each participant based on what they think the verse tackles.

3.4.2.2 The contrasting nature

The contrasting nature of the sets of verses is one way to give the interviewee opportunities to think more deeply about what may otherwise seem to be a straightforward theme. Having to respond to both verses (even with the contrasting nature) can result in a richer production

of data. Rubin and Rubin (2012: 103) suggest that interviewers 'can encourage a deeper response by asking about apparent contradictions.' Holstein and Gubrium (1995: 77) too maintain that '[a]sking the respondent to address a topic from one point of view, then another, is a way of activating the respondent's stock of knowledge, of exploring the various ways that the respondent attaches meaning to the phenomenon under investigation.'

While this idea of 'asking' respondents to tackle the topic from different angles can be done in traditional interviews by asking challenging questions, it can be done in an easier and more authentic way (as proposed in this research) by providing the participants with what can be described as an equally-authoritative seemingly-contradictory verse for them to read and explain. Surely, follow-up questions can serve a similar purpose along those lines. In follow-up questions, some hypothetical scenarios can be used, and this can help the interviewee clarify their opinion or perhaps elaborate more on what they meant. Follow-up questions can also have a challenging angle in order for the discussion to be richer and to possibly investigate multiple layers of the topic. Rubin and Rubin (2012: 163) suggest posing the challenging follow-up (hypothetical) questions by 'putting the words in someone else's mouth' by suggesting, for example, that others may say the opposite. They maintain that this strategy can make the challenge 'a bit softer.'

Personal Reflection

Interviewees had been informed about this nature of the interview with the ethical view that I do not want them to feel 'attacked' or that their religious beliefs were being doubted (especially with Muslim interviewees since we do not share the same faith). One interviewee (Mostapha, Muslim Egyptian, 29) felt anxious when I mentioned the word 'challenging' but the interview went smoothly and I think it could be the bad word choice on my part. Another interviewee (Maryam, Muslim British, 35) expressed her distaste of the expression 'to be the devil's advocate' making a sarcastic comment that the devil needs no advocates. So perhaps, the approach to informing potential interviewees about the challenging nature of some questions needs to be handled with some sensitivity.

This led me to use the word 'contrasting' instead of 'contradictory', and it has been useful to mention to the potential participants especially those whose faith I do not share, that my questions were out of ignorance and that I was interested in knowing more.

It is not surprising that I felt less worried before an interview with a Christian than I did with a Muslim. This is partly because I did not want to offend any participant by asking the wrong question or giving an inappropriate comment. I felt more self-conscious before each of those interviews especially the first few; however, they all went on and ended on very pleasant notes (as detailed in the data later). Perhaps that extra care and caution that I applied in interviewing participants from a different faith helped smoothen the interview setting and seemed to be reflected in my questions and interaction which a lot of my Muslim participants described as respectful, engaging, and showing interest.

It is understandable that sometimes some interviewees may 'adopt a defensive posture' (Rubin and Rubin, 2012: 182) giving answers that they think are 'the proper cultural response.' It could also be the case that interview questions themselves may lead to socially desirable or idealistic answers or 'party lines' (Rubin and Rubin, 2012: 35) especially if the design is not tight enough. Questions such as 'what would you do if' and the like may yield answers that the interviewee at best thinks will be his or her reaction and at worst thinks that the interviewer wants to hear. Social psychology studies are replete with examples where participants were asked about what they would do if asked to hurt someone or help someone, etc. In some cases, people were asked about the percentage of participants who would inflict pain on innocent people upon the request of authority, and their answers do not seem to match the real results of famous studies (such as Stanley Milgram's study and the Stanford Prison Experiment, Zimbardo, 2007).

In this study, this is dealt with to a certain extent by including contrasting pairs of verses and by asking for personal stories. This will lend itself to some answers that are 'genuine' (as far as possible in an interview setting). After all, the target is not to know what the interviewee would really do or what he or she understands from the verses. It is, rather, the construction of meaning that they go through when prompted by a text to which they subscribe. The way

they articulate their thinking can shed some light on the thinking patterns leading to some insights onto their personalities, cultures, background, etc.

3.4.2.3 The final list of the verses used in this research

For Christians:

Matthew 5:16 New International Version (NIV)

In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

Matthew 6:3 New International Version (NIV)

But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing,

Exodus 20:12 New International Version (NIV)

Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you.

Matthew 10:37 New International Version (NIV)

Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.

Psalm 8:4-5 New International Version (NIV)

What is mankind that you are mindful of them,
human beings that you care for them?

You have made them a little lower than the angels
and crowned them with glory and honor.

James 4:14 New International Version (NIV)

… What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.

For Muslims:

(Ad-Duha 11)

And proclaim the Grace of your Lord.

(Al-Baqara 271)

If you disclose your *Sadaqat*, it is well, but if you conceal it, and give it to the poor, that is better for you.

(Al-Isra' 23)

And that you be dutiful to your parents.

(Al-Mujadelah 22)

You will not find any people who believe in Allah and the Last Day, making friendship with those who oppose Allah and His Messenger, even though they were their fathers, or their sons, or their brothers, or their kindred.

(Al-Isra' 70)

And indeed We have honoured the Children of Adam.

(Al-Ahzab 72)

But man bore it. Verily, he was unjust and ignorant.

An Arabic version was provided to Arabic speakers (for a total of 12 participants from three Arabic-speaking countries) (Appendix II for the Biblical verses and Appendix III for the Quranic verses).

3.5 Population and sampling

The population of this study comprises subscribers to the Bible and subscribers to the Quran. The study started with Christians and Muslims in Egypt and the UK where potential participants were recruited; it was then extended to include other nationalities. Extending the population to include any nationality was based on the observation that the initial data constructed with the Egyptian and the British participants (a total of 19 participants) did not suggest any recurring patterns linked to the two national cultures.

The reason behind the choice of certain faiths to recruit participants from is that it is among the followers of faith that one can be more likely to find subscribers to the sacred text. (This can seem to be the opposite direction of how research should naturally happen: a researcher should seek to provide prompts that he or she knows to be relevant to the participants he or she is interested in interviewing. For the specific purpose of this empirical part of the research, the decision has been to recruit participants who would find such texts personal and relevant.)

Purposive and convenience sampling is the technique used to recruit interviewees. In purposive sampling, certain candidates are selected for their fit based on the criteria sought in the research design (and this type of purposive sampling is usually referred to as criterion purposive sampling, according to Wellington and Szczerbinski, 2007). Purposive sampling, rather than representative or random sampling, is a preferred method in interpretive research (Wellington and Szczerbinski, 2007), and it is a non-probability type of sampling where candidates are selected for inclusion into a non-probabilistic sample for some specific criteria sought in this particular research ‘that will allow the research questions to be answered.’ (Bryman, 2016: 410). The purposive sampling does not follow any statistical

representation of the subcultures in the population studied. Snowball sampling is also used in this research, where one interviewee recommends another candidate to be interviewed and so on (Arksey and Knight, 1999).

Generalisability is not a concern in this study (and usually generally in qualitative studies (Brown and Osman, 2017)) as it is the in-depth insights gained from the interviews that are sought. It is worth noting here that in a qualitative study such as this, a sample cannot (and should not) be 'representative' of the 'population'. After all, one cannot extrapolate the findings of a study investigating Muslim or Christian participants onto all Muslims or all Christians everywhere. Lincoln and Guba (1985) even maintain that the concept of population (in research terms) is 'foreign' (p. 224) and 'suspect' (p. 297). One strength as far as populations are concerned, is that the recruitment of participants in this study was done along self-identified religious beliefs (Christians and Muslims) which can be argued, as was done in the Literature Review chapter (section 2.2), to be more accurate and meaningful than using the national cultural identities only.

3.5.1 Criteria sought in interviewees selection

A total of 28 interviews were conducted. Fifteen of the participants described themselves as Christian, and 13 as Muslim (including two Sufis and two Shi'as). In terms of their gender, 15 were female and 13 were male (the term gender here is used as a binary characteristic and will not be dealt with to mean something different for the purpose of the current research). Their nationalities included ten Egyptians, four who described themselves as British, three Pakistani British, two Arabs, two Pakistanis, one from South-East Asia, one Rwandan, one Irish, one Indian, one British Cypriot, one half-British half-Sicilian, and one half-British half-Pakistani/Bengali. (For anonymity purposes some participants' nationalities are referred to with the description of the region (the Arab world and South-East Asia) rather than the country they come from, as they may otherwise be easier to trace in the data.)

The participants' age range was from 18 to 63. Three of the interviewees were younger than 20 years old, six were in their 20s, 11 in their 30s, four in their 40s, two in their 50s, and two in their early 60s.

It is believed that the 28 interviews with participants from different backgrounds and age groups provided some good insights into the use of sacred texts as tools to enhance social research interviews. The data gathered from the interviews were enough to answer the research question and to achieve the three research objectives. Douglas (1985) suggests a point of saturation at 25 interviews. In saturation, some form of 'redundancy' seems to develop, and further interviews do not seem to offer insights worth the effort and time spent (given the scope and timeframe of the research and what Wellington and Szczerbinski (2007: 104) refer to as the 'diminishing returns'.) In this study, very few insights were gained from the 22nd interview onwards, and saturation seemed to have been reached after the 23rd interview. However, it was decided to carry on with the already-scheduled interviews, reaching a total of 28 interviews. The final few interviews, therefore, served to confirm the insights gleaned from the previous ones (Francis et al., 2009), and while some 'content' was different, the strategies used by the participants as well as the dynamics of the interview setting seemed similar to the previous interviews, showing some redundancy.

Each of the 28 interviewees has been represented at least three times. The choice of quotes represented in the data was based on the relevance and representativeness to the discussed themes. This means that some interviewees feature more often than others in the date presented.

Interviewees are to fit the following definitions (practical definitions specific for this study) to qualify as suitable candidates for the inclusion in this study:

A subscriber to the sacred text is a self-identified Muslim/Christian who assents to the Quran/Bible as the Word of Allah/God respectively. Whether the person sees him- or herself as devout or not, goes regularly to mosque/church, etc. is not highly relevant for the purpose

of inclusion in this particular study. This is established by directly asking the participant whether he or she considers the Quran/Bible to be the Word of Allah/God. While some constructs or identity circles (such as subscription to a holy text or believing in a certain deity) may not be easily established via observation or some other 'accurate' measures, self-reporting is the technique used here to establish such a connection to the text used. Initial recruitment takes place by approaching Muslims and Christians since it is among these groups that one can be more likely to find subscribers to the relevant sacred text. For example, Pew Research Center (Geiger, 2017) reports that '[t]hree-quarters of Christians [in the USA] say they believe the Bible is the word of God. Eight-in-ten Muslims (83%) say the Quran is the word of God.'

The recruitment of the participants for this study was done via approaching friends, colleagues and acquaintances from the University of Bedfordshire, the University Chaplaincy, Facebook friends (via a Facebook status explaining the research), the local church, and via the interviewees' recommendation of friends.

The participants' nationalities are also based on their self-identification. Some participants (from nationalities other than British) have been living in the UK for some time, but they preferred to self-identify with their countries of origin. Some had roots in other nationalities and preferred to be introduced as half-British half-Sicilian, for example. The nationality here is to be treated as another description the same way professions, age, family structure, education, etc. are.

A detailed account of the demographic information of the participants who took part in this study is included in Appendix IV. The details include each participant's religion; gender; age; the length and medium of the interview; and how the participant was recruited.

3.6 Pilot study

A pilot study (of five interviews) was conducted to check the viability of this kind of empirical research. A few things were fine-tuned as a result of the pilot study:

– An explicit question was added to the beginning of the interview time asking participants to clarify what the Bible/the Quran represents to them. This was thought to help establish the perception of the sacred writings and perhaps can explain the familiarity of the interviewees with the verses and/or the notions discussed.

– A decision was taken to have the typed verses individually laminated. This served the practical purpose of reusing them in further interviews. It has also made it easy to handle the verses with the respect needed especially with participants from a faith different to the interviewer's.

– A unification of the size of Arabic and English fonts used in both Quranic and Biblical verses (size 20 bold for the verse itself, and size 20 normal for the reference (Arabic) and bold (English) and normal for the version (New international Version [NIV]): (the final list of the verses used in this research is in section 3.4.2.3).

– An option was explicitly added to allow and encourage participants to look up the verse and/or context (and this was done in the pilot study too) and to look up different translations too (some preferred translations other than the New International Version, and some in further interviews had more than one translation on their phones).

– After the pilot study, all Arabic verses were supplemented with accent markers (or what is called short vowel signs). Quranic verses are usually seen with accent markers, which makes it easier to read words properly since vowel sounds (especially short vowels) in Arabic are not consistently represented by dedicated letters. Adding accent markers is not always necessary (as one can guess the proper pronunciation from the context (Abu-Rabia,

1999)), but it seems to add an official and clearer feel to written Arabic. The same has been done to Biblical verses in Arabic for the same purpose.

3.7 Ethics approval and obtaining participants' informed consent

Ethics approval was obtained from the University of Bedfordshire, Business and Management Research Institute Ethics Committee. Obtaining informed consent from willing participants was via providing potential candidates with an Information Sheet that explained the scope and details of the study as well as other details (length of recorded interviews, supervisor's contact email, etc.) and a Consent Form for the willing participants to put their initials and date. (Both forms are attached in Appendices V and VII and the Arabic versions in Appendices VI and VIII.) Candidates were informed that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any point without having to give an explanation. The voluntary participation and the possibility to withdraw without giving reasons are important from an ethical point of view (Oliver, 2003) but also as 'tactics to help ensure honesty' (in the words of Shenton, 2004: 66), and honesty here means that volunteering participants are more likely to give trustworthy answers to research questions.

3.8 The interviewing process

Interviews were conducted at the University of Bedfordshire (in a pre-booked room); and that was to give a professional standardised feel to the interview across all participants living in the UK. The interview procedure was explained (prior to video-recording) and following is the general information given to participants before the actual video-recording and interview questions took place:

Each participant was asked whether they had read the information sheet and whether they had any questions. Participants were again reassured of the anonymity of their output in the final product. Each was asked to suggest a pseudonym that could replace his or her first name. In this case, quotes are presented keeping anonymity but at the same time putting

some ‘face’ to the words for a better readability. Interviewees were asked to choose a pseudonym that can be perceived by the reader to carry the same gender, nationality, and religion of the participant. The choice of a pseudonym by the participant can also make it easier for them to trace back their input in the final work.

All pseudonyms chosen by participants were used in this work apart from the pseudonym Christina that was changed into Nancy. The visual similarity between the name Christina and the adjective Christian (which due to the nature of this study appears a lot) would have possibly made reading the document harder.

Personal Reflection

I was pleasantly surprised when one interviewee (Kala, South-East Asia, 46) was really appreciative after the interview ended, and she chose to comment on how professional I sounded when I advised her to choose a pseudonym instead of her real name, with which she had no problem being used. She maintained that she had not been aware of the implications of having her opinions in print for years to come. It is a huge responsibility on the shoulders of the researcher to make sure that the safety and welfare of the participants are maintained even (or perhaps especially) when they think it is fine to use their real names, traceable details or information that they may regret having shared in the future.

It is also clear from quoting Kala’s region rather than country of origin that her quotes might have been easier to trace back to her if her country of origin was mentioned. This is a decision that was taken together with her at the end of the interview.

Participants were also informed that the purpose was to co-construct the knowledge via engaging in dialogue and that the questions were not to be taken as defensive or interrogatory in any sense. As interviewer, the need was to understand and at the same time contribute to the knowledge production. Mishler (1991: vii) maintains that ‘[a]n interview is a joint product of what interviewees and interviewers talk about together.’ Participants were

also encouraged to talk as much as they wanted as it was in their examples and stories that the author was interested (Rubin and Rubin, 2012).

3.8.1 Interview format

Twenty interviews were conducted face-to-face with participants who were available to attend the interview in person in the University of Bedfordshire, Luton, UK, and eight interviews were conducted online via Skype (or similar platforms such as Messenger and JusTalk) for those who were abroad or unable to come in person. Hanna (2012: 239) is of the opinion that conducting interviews via Skype benefits the interaction as it includes access to some non-verbal communication allowing the researcher to 'reap the documented benefits of traditional face-to-face interviews in qualitative research.' Hanna (2012) also maintains that Skype interviews provide an opportunity for interviewers and interviewees each to be comfortable in a familiar environment, cutting down on the travel costs, and allowing for recording of the video interaction. Bryman (2016) also maintains that the visual element in Skype interviews resembles that of face-to-face interviews.

Personal Reflection

Due to the sensitivity of religious texts context, I was in favour of conducting interviews in a face-to-face setting as much as possible before choosing to Skype. The possibility of internet connection loss or bad signals and having to re-establish the connection may add unnecessary tension and may lead to less than a smooth experience on the interviewee's side. Another challenge in a Skype-based setting is the casual feel it has. As a medium introduced and advertised to connect friends and family socially, it may not inherently carry the 'pious' feel connected to discussing sacred texts. When the stakes are that high (with sacred texts being discussed), it may be a better idea to mimic a real-life authentic discussion of the topic (and Skype may not be the typical context where such discussions can be expected to take place). Practical logistics are to be taken into account; however, and at least with participants from a different belief than me (in this case, Muslim participants), I felt that face-to-face interviews should be the first option.

Of the 28 interviews, 20 were conducted face-to-face, and eight via the Skype (or Messenger or JusTalk) platform, and contrary to my initial fears, the Skype interviews went as well as did the face-to-face interviews (in terms of the suitability of the setting to discuss sacred texts); however, for me connection problems made the Skype interview less than a smooth experience. For me, I would feel more comfortable being interviewed in a face-to-face setting.

When the video-recorded interview started, interviewees were asked to give some personal information (their age, marital status, occupation, their perceived nationality(ies), and any other information they thought could be relevant to their relationship with the sacred texts). Examples of this sort of information include: whether they go to church/mosque, their prayer patterns, whether they observe certain religious practices, what the Bible (for Christian participants) or the Quran (for Muslim participants) represents to them, etc.

Video (or audio) recording (versus note-taking) allows for a more accurate reproduction of the interview data (in the form of quotations); it also gives the interviewer a better chance to be fully engaging with the discussion without having to divide the attention on note-taking and engaging with the interviewee (Rubin and Rubin, 2012). Moreover, video (or audio) recording allows for capturing all the dynamics of the interview including what the interviewer says (Wellington and Szczerbinski, 2007), how long the pauses are, among other non-verbal communication cues (Hermanowicz, 2002). In this piece of empirical research, it has been important to investigate that too, and some such features are discussed in the data.

Personal Reflection

Six participants who were not very keen on being video-recorded were given the choice to be voice-recorded only. They felt more accepting of the idea when told that accurate quoting would be guaranteed if the interview is recorded in comparison to taking notes (Hermanowicz, 2002). With the agreement of these participants, a video camera was still used but it was directed away from their faces.

3.8.2 Outline of the content of each interview

Research interviews usually start with what could be called an interview schedule which is a set of questions that aims to tackle the themes in which the researcher is interested. The interview schedule is informed by an interview guide (Wellington and Szczerbinski, 2007). Since this empirical piece of research is a vehicle to examine the use of sacred texts (instead of designed questions), the set of selected verses used in the interviews can be called the interview guide. Maykut and Morehouse (1994: 84) use the term 'categories of inquiry' to refer to the ideas or areas that the researcher wants to investigate. This means that the proposed enhancing technique here is built around selecting sacred texts that seem to address some 'categories of inquiry' (rather than the more specific term, 'themes') with the presumption that the texts themselves will prompt the themes relevant to each individual interviewee. Such a proposal means going one step backwards (to an interview guide rather than the more detailed schedule) allowing interviewees to generate their relevant themes so they can lead the discussion to the directions they see more relevant to them (Hoffmann, 2007), rather than being led to follow the themes proposed by the researcher.

The main content of the interview revolved around the three sets of verses from the participant's relevant sacred book. One verse was given at a time. Verses had been typed with the same font and font size on laminated slips of paper (see Figure 1). Verses were not read aloud by the interviewer; the interviewees were given the chance to hold the verses (or see them on the screen in the case of a Skype interview) and read them themselves. Some of them read it aloud (as the video camera could not capture what they were reading). Not reading the verses by the interviewer served to avoid stressing some phrases or words that may have meaning or focus relevant to the interviewer more than the interviewee.

They were then asked to explain the verse and if possible retell a personal anecdote related to the verse. A seemingly-contradictory (contrasting) verse was then introduced and the participant was asked to comment on it.

The process was repeated (with the three sets of verses, a total of six verses with each participant), and finally participants were asked whether they had any further comments to add.

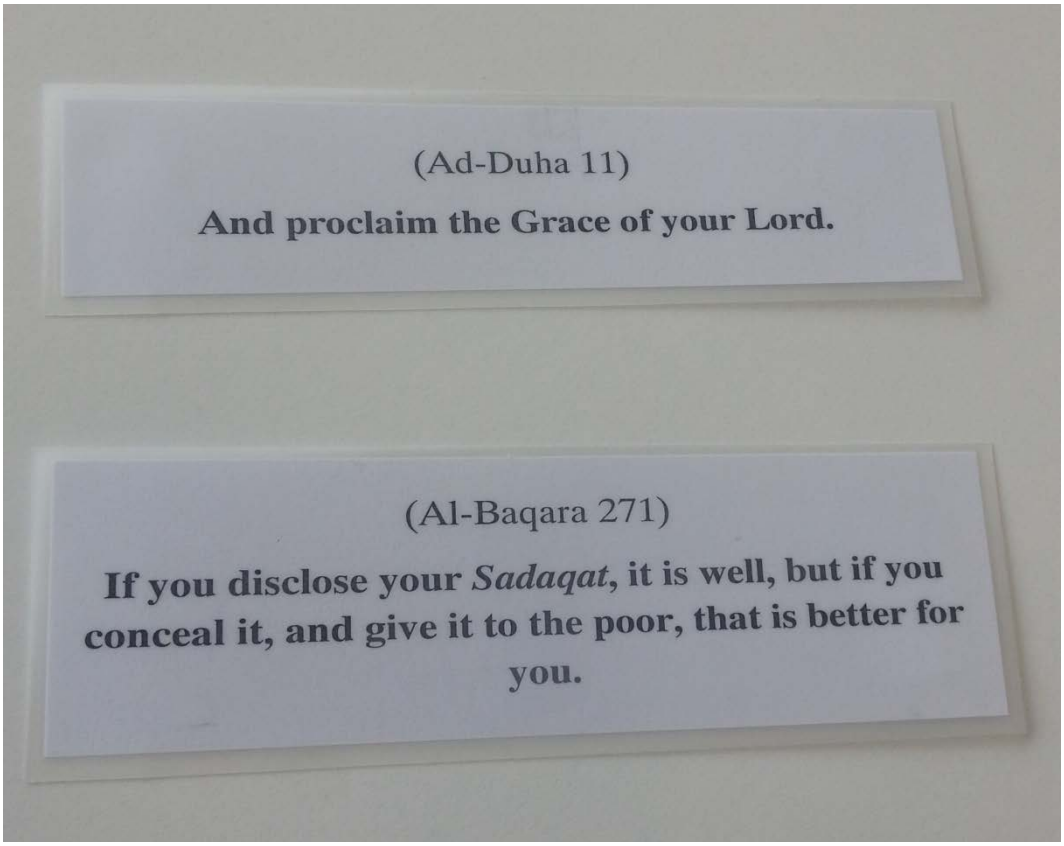


Figure 1 The first two (out of six) verses used with Muslim participants

After having discussed the six verses, participants were also asked what they thought and how they felt being asked around verses from their sacred books. Participants were also asked whether they would have responded differently if it had been another interviewer (of a different gender, nationality, or religion) conducting the interview.

3.8.3 Language used with interviewees

For Arabic speakers, the Information Sheet and Consent Form used the professionally held Modern Standard Arabic (as an 'access language', in Welch and Piekkari's (2006: 425) words, to reflect the professional nature of the research). The interviews, however, were conducted in the language(s) that the interviewee felt comfortable using. Some Arabic speakers used some English words and code-switched from time to time depending on their proficiency and comfort in the use of English (as they normally would do with somebody like the author, i.e. somebody they know would understand both English and Arabic). Some also used their regional Arabic accent/vocabulary that sometimes differed from that of the interviewer's Egyptian dialect.

With the ten Egyptian participants and two Arabs, day-to-day Egyptian Arabic (on the interviewer's side) was used in the interview as this research intended to resemble a communicative setting as much as possible. Using one's mother tongue (as he or she would with friends) should be the way adopted in such an interview setting. Participants were allowed (and encouraged) to switch to English any time they felt they wanted to. Other studies have adopted the same technique; for example, Lu and Gatua (2014: 11) reported that 'the interview language(s) [in a study of Chinese immigrants] were determined by participants' language preferences, which were mainly based on their self-perception of language proficiency.' They maintain that while the participants spoke Mandarin, 'sometimes an English word expresses their thoughts better or occasionally they had difficulty in finding the Chinese words to express their meaning.'

Personal Reflection

With two Arabic speakers whose dialects were slightly different to mine, I caught myself wondering what an expression meant, and I would keep a mental note of it till the participant paused and then I would ask what the word meant. It was interesting to see such a dynamic that naturally features in my conversations with friends from other backgrounds in the

Arabic-speaking world (slightly similar to what could happen between an American and a British person). It is, however, reassuring that those two participants were comfortable enough to speak flowingly in their own dialects even with some difficulty on my side to capture some words. No meaning was missed because I would take a note of what I did not get from the context and would ask for clarification.

3.9 Credibility, dependability and confirmability

As far as objectivity is concerned (or in naturalistic inquiries term: confirmability), Shenton (2004: 72) maintains that 'steps must be taken to help ensure as far as possible that the work's findings are the result of the experiences and ideas of the informants, rather than the characteristics and preferences of the researcher.' It is worth noting here that one of those steps could be as early as in the choice of interview questions (or research-enhancing tools) that cater to the participants' worlds rather than to the researcher's preferences and assumptions.

In Holstein and Gubrium's (1995: 14) words, 'interviewing is a project for producing meaning,' and this means that knowledge (or even opinions, values, attitudes, etc.) may not (and usually do not) exist on their own within the respondents waiting to pour out in an interview setting; rather, knowledge is constructed in an interview setting as a result of the dynamic nature of this active process of interviewing. The interviewer does not simply trigger or uncover or prompt the interviewee to respond or answer or 'give' the answer; rather, they both engage in a process where the result is the production of some knowledge (that is still, by nature, subject to interpretation, misinterpretation, etc.). This dynamic nature may seem 'less robust' (lacking 'validity' and/or reliability); however, it should be seen as mimicking real life where 'realities' (or aspects thereof) are continuously constructed and negotiated (at least from a social constructionist perspective).

An interview setting in this case is as genuine and normal as a normal genuine conversation where this give-and-take can be seen, appreciated, and accepted. Another give-and-take takes place when the co-constructed knowledge is 'interpreted' further, presented in a research document, and 'read' (where the reader in turn engages with the document in a further dialogue where another co- or reconstruction of some of the knowledge can further take place). The reader then can be seen as looking at a 'portrait' painted by the researcher who in this case recognises and interprets what he or she understands from the participants and paints what should be similar to what the participants said. The researcher in this case is not a photographer producing an exact photo of what 'there is' (Rubin and Rubin, 2012: 32).

The purpose of the interview in its active nature explained above is to provide the environment where a deep dialogue can result in the co-construction of some knowledge. The interviewer in this case (as the one who leads) is responsible for asking questions (or as in the case of this research asking questions based on relevant interview tools) that would provide such an opportunity. When the interviewer actively provides other points of view or angles to look at the topic, richer data can result. Holstein and Gubrium (1995: 17) maintain that 'active interviewers … converse with respondents in such a way that alternate considerations are brought into play.' Using contrasting sets of verses in this research provides the participants with what may seem to be some other angles to the same topic, and this in turn can facilitate the co-production of richer data. Holstein and Gubrium (1995: 17) argue that '[t]he objective is not to dictate interpretation but to provide an environment conducive to the production of the range and complexity of meanings that address relevant issues, and not be confined by predetermined agendas.'

In the process of co-producing meaning (in active interviews), interviewees may access more than one context in the same interview (which is the same stance taken by Relevance Theory (Sperber and Wilson, 2004) in discussing verbal utterances in general). They may

take different positions and attempt to think and give answers based on a wide range of roles or persona they can have.

This research design makes it easy for participants (as a starting point) to know which domain to draw upon (at least initially), i.e. spirituality, God, or religion. Knowing that the interviews revolve around sacred texts, they may activate this domain and expect their answers to be derived from them 'being Christians or Muslims'. While this may be limiting to the range of contexts from which the interviewees can draw their answers at least initially, this may make it easier for them to focus rather than search in an unlimited repository of contexts or domains to find some (perhaps hypothetical or idealistic) answers to hypothetical questions. As the interview progresses, they may find themselves more inclined to assume (and report on) special social roles they play, and this can lead to a change of context (on the course of a dynamic and active interview) especially when they are asked during the interview to report on personal anecdotes and examples from their own lives.

Holstein and Gubrium (1995: 33–34) call this '[p]ositional [s]hifts and [r]esource [a]ctivation.' Under this title they maintain that,

> '[w]ith the interviewer's help, the respondent *activates* different aspects of his or her stocks of knowledge, which we can hear in the conversational give-and-take of the interview. In the course of many open-ended interviews, for example, respondents intersperse their responses to interview items with telltale phrases such as "speaking as a mother," "thinking like a woman," "if I were in her shoes," "after I heard what he said," "wearing my professional hat," "on second thought," "when you bother to think about it," "now that you ask," "I'm not sure about that one," and "I haven't really thought about it." The phrases tell of changing roles, shifts in narrative positions that, in turn, signal stocks of knowledge pertinent to the point of view being taken or the complexities of telling.' [italics in original]

In active interviews, the respondents' answers are, according to Holstein and Gubrium (1995: 32) 'history-in-the-making' and this simply means that respondents are not merely reciting or rehearsing or remembering or regurgitating their histories; rather, they are telling them while still making them. The active dynamic nature of such interviews would then allow

for contradictions, changes of opinions, and some enlightening moments for the participants as they tell their stories and answer the questions.

Personal Reflection

Omar (Muslim British, 42) is a good example of this as he felt the he benefited from the interview. His comment made it feel as if some knowledge was unearthed by the dynamic give-and-take nature of the interview (according to him, thanks to the qualities and abilities he saw in me, the interviewer, who helped him).

Holstein and Gubrium (1995: 37) maintain that one merit of active interviews is that they allow for this shifting among the positions of participants and this can provide rich data and different angles. They say,

> '[t]reating the interview as active allows the interviewer to encourage the respondent to shift positions in the interview so as to explore alternate perspectives and stocks of knowledge. Rather than searching for the best or most authentic answer, the aim is to systematically activate applicable ways of knowing – the possible answers – that respondents can reveal, as diverse and controversial as they might be.'

This last point may justify the idea of prompting the interviewees to certain positions (as long as it is not biased in a way that can 'block' what can be otherwise activated without the 'prompt').

Although the terms validity and reliability seem to fit more with positivistic (mostly quantitative) studies, it is worth commenting on the robustness, credibility, and confirmability or reproducibility of data and knowledge gained from the type of interviews described above (dynamic, active interviews where co-construction of data takes place). In qualitative studies sitting within the interpretive paradigm, there is a preference to use other terms to refer to the trustworthiness of research (Shenton, 2004) (although some authors (such as Morse et al., 2002) argue for the use of the same quantitative terms.) The terms usually adopted by

qualitative studies are credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Following is a quote from *The Active Interview* by Holstein and Gubrium (1995: 9):

> 'When the interview is viewed as a dynamic, meaning-making occasion … different criteria apply, centered on how meaning is constructed, the circumstances of construction, and the meaningful linkages that are assembled for the occasion. Although interest in the content of answers persists, it is primarily in how and what the subject/respondent, in collaboration with an equally active interviewer, produces and conveys about the subject/respondent's experience under the interpretive circumstances at hand. One cannot expect answers on one occasion to replicate those on another because they emerge from different circumstances of production. Similarly, the validity of answers derives not from their correspondence to meanings held within the respondent but from their ability to convey situated experiential realities in terms that are locally comprehensible.'

3.10 Data analysis plan

According to Wellington and Szczerbinski (2007: 106), a mixture of both *a priori* (predefined) and *a posteriori* (emerging) categories should be the approach to look at the data. In their view this is 'the most common and … the most rational approach to analysing qualitative data.' They maintain that:

> 'Existing categories, derived from past research and previous literature, can be brought to the data and used to make sense of it. But frequently there will be new data which require new thought and new categorization'

For the data analysis of this study, the video materials are analysed for the features described in the literature (discussed in section 2.6.2) along with other new themes. The possibility of new features is not excluded, especially that sacred texts have not been used as tools in social research interviews prior to this study.

3.10.1 Thematic analysis

To answer the research question and to achieve the research aim and objectives in this study, Thematic Analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) is the analytical technique of choice. It is,

however, worth noting that other analytical techniques are also possible, and this depends on each empirical study's research aim. For example, a study may want to investigate the use of language and the expression of power in the interview dynamics or how narratives are told. For the purpose of this research, the main data are those that can be analysed for the dynamics and the content of the social research interviews conducted with the help of tools (sacred texts).

The flexibility offered by thematic analysis fits this research and provides a manageable way to analyse the data. The themes are not decided prior to the data collection stage; however, a combination of the new data and what the literature says about good-quality interview data is taken in consideration when analysing the interview videos. The data are analysed (after an ample time of being 'immersed' in the data (Wellington and Szczerbinski, 2007; Jones et al., 2013) by watching the interview videos several times), and the interesting recurring patterns are organised in codes and then into well-defined themes.

The patterns are expected to be in: the dynamics of the interviews and the techniques used by the interviewees in relating to the enhancing tools used in the interview setting (achieving RO 1), the features of empowerment of participants (RO 2) and the qualities of the nature of the content of the data such as the richness, variety and nuances (RO 3). This is called inductive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006: 83) as opposed to deductive or theoretical thematic analysis where there is a 'pre-existing coding frame.'

Latent (or interpretative) thematic analysis looks at the interpretation of what is being communicated in interviews or in the data in general rather than what is being said (as in semantic thematic analysis) (Braun and Clarke, 2006). With Relevance Theory (Sperber and Wilson, 2004) in mind, the linguistic code (the actual language in utterances) does not rank as the only thing there is when it comes to communication; it is what could be relevant in a given context. It is not what the sentence or words mean; rather, it is what the speaker (the

interviewee in this case) means. Inductive Latent (interpretative) thematic analysis matches the constructionist view (Braun and Clarke, 2006) and the framework of Relevance Theory.

The themes are not necessarily to do with answers to the interview questions (as in what respecting parents is, for example) (RO 3) only; it is also, however, the techniques that the interviewees use to think and articulate their answers and how they conduct themselves in general in the interview (RO 2), and also the dynamics of the interview in terms of the interaction with the interviewer (RO 1).

The computer software NVivo 11 was used mainly to organise the video data and make it easier and quicker to retrieve it (Kara, 2015: 114). Coding and categorising were done manually (after being immersed in the data by watching the videos over and over). The software also facilitated the counting of some instances of particular codes giving some general glimpses of some techniques or approaches more common in the participant's approaches to their answers.

For the purpose of this research, the analysis is focused on the what, how and who: the content of the data (the product), the dynamics of the interviews (the process) and interaction between the interviewer and interviewee as conversation partners.

3.10.2 Other available types of analysis – and coding

Other kinds of analysis do not seem to match the theoretical frameworks with which the author is working. For example, Relevance Theory (Sperber and Wilson, 2004) does not seem to be interested in (or agreeing with) understanding the utterances at the micro-level of words. Rather, contexts are triggered and understanding happens (according to Relevance Theory) through inference. Content analysis, therefore, would not be a suitable kind of analysis strategy with its semi-quantitative take, and it is the author's belief that the counts and frequency of the use of a certain word or phrase may offer little to shed light on the meaning. After all, speakers may generally have some speech habits where they use certain expressions more often than others. People may also rarely use certain expressions that are

so significant that one does not need to mention them, and vice versa. This may have little to do with what they (intend to) communicate. Therefore, it is neither the 'language' *per se* nor the 'dynamics' of its use that are the focus of the analysis for the purpose of this study.

Along similar lines, conversation analysis does not seem to meet the criteria or dynamics of how communication takes place as it is more interested in 'fine-grained analyses of spoken interactions such as the use of overlap, pauses, increased volume and pitch and what these reveal about how people relate to each other in what they are saying and doing with language' (Paltridge, 2012: 5). These are not what this research is focused on.

Having said that, as part of the analysis of the product (the 'what', the data), the researcher investigates the richness and nuanced nature of data that may lend itself to be analysable using different approaches based on the focus of each piece of research (to achieve Research Objective 3). This means that in other pieces of research where the focus is on the use of 'overlap and pauses' and the textual structure, conversation analysis is the analytical technique of choice (possibly with the same data gathered in this research). The same applies to Discourse Analysis (to investigate the power dynamics) or Content Analysis if they are deemed the analytical techniques lending themselves to answering the research question(s) of other pieces of research.

3.10.3 Analysis of the research process and the participants' perception of the research method

Because of the gap in the literature in empirically examining the possibility of using sacred texts as enhancing tools in social research interviews, a closer look at the dynamics of the interviews is needed (RO 1). This should include the perception of the participants (ROs 1 and 2) as well as the criteria of depth, richness and authenticity of data constructed in interviews (detailed in the Literature Review chapter, section 2.6.2) (RO 3).

Kara (2015) maintains that it is rare, apart from some participatory research, that participants' perception of the research process is investigated. In this research, all

interviewees were explicitly asked (after having discussed the three sets of verses) about how they felt before and during the interview and what they thought of the method (being interviewed using sacred texts). Although questions of this type may yield positive answers with the aim to satisfy the interviewer, there is an opportunity for the interviewee to say how this research could have been done differently. They also commented on how they would have reacted if the researcher had been someone else (of a different gender, background, or more importantly religion, or someone they do not know). This part of the interview is not done with the intention to empower participants or to benefit them directly; it is, rather, the enhancement and/or the examination of the viability of the research method that is the target behind this set of questions, and this assists in answering at least one part of the Research Question related to the challenges of using sacred texts as tools in interviews.

3.10.4 Interviews transcriptions and data presentation

While some researchers may take transcribing as a routine step, in the case of this research, transcribing is not a step between data collection and analysis. Instead, data are analysed in their original mode (spoken in a face-to-face setting) and language (in either only Arabic or only English or interviews where code-switching took place). According to Paltridge (2015: 64), '[t]he way we use language in a particular genre … depends on whether the text is written or spoken.'

Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) argue that transcription is a process of interpretation in its own right, and that changing the spoken output into a written format is not as objective as it may seem. Braun and Clarke (2006: 87–88) seem to quote Lapadat and Lindsay (1999) in favour of transcription, since they maintain that transcription is an 'interpretative act where meanings are created, rather than simply a mechanical act of putting spoken sounds on paper' (favouring it as it provides some interpretation leading to more interpretation of the data at further stages too). However, it seems that this interpretation may lose connection with the data in its original spoken format. Lapadat and Lindsay (1999: 64) believe that transcription is 'theory laden' and that researchers usually transcribe with some theory in

mind, which may constrain the interpretation. That is why Mishler (1991: 48) maintains that every way among the many ways to prepare a transcript is ‘a partial representation of speech.’ Mishler goes on to say that ‘each representation is also a transformation’ since there are decisions of inclusion and exclusion, and this gets even more complex with the non-verbal features.

Remaining close to the original data (by watching the videos several times) can provide a good way to familiarise oneself with the data in preparation for noticing recurring patterns. This is especially needed in a piece of research such as this, where the interviewing technique is used for the first time, and openness needs to be there in approaching the data. It also allows the researcher to remain faithful to the original format in which the speakers naturally produced their utterances instead of analysing the transcribed form. Some authors (such as Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004: 654) maintain that written discourse is usually more ‘lexically dense’ than the spoken format where content words are not tightly connected. Paltridge (2012: 138–139) also maintains that spoken texts may be ‘more fragmented’ than written texts. He, however, maintains that spoken and written discourses are not simply different with a specific difference, but that the ‘differences are most usefully seen as being on a scale, or continuum.’

Another consideration in this research is the fact that some of the interviews are conducted in Arabic (and sometimes with code-switching between Arabic and English depending on the proficiency level and preference of the interviewee). Transcribing and translating may lead to some loss of meaning of the original data (long before the further data analysis stages). In this case, further analysis would be of ‘data’ removed or distanced from the original production setting, i.e. the interview. Lu and Gatua (2014: 3) maintain that ‘translating during analysis makes it possible to capture implicit and explicit meanings from the data as well as cultural specific expressions and concepts, and hence may be a more favourable method for research conducted in a language other than English.’ In this case they say that it is more favourable to translate during analysis rather than before it.

Since repetition seems to feature in conversations more than written texts (Paltridge, 2012: 153), Kara (2015) suggests, among other things, the use of a poetry format to transcribe the speech. Since repetition and rhythm both feature in spoken language and in poetry (Swann, 2006), it can be argued that presenting the oral data in a poetry format can represent what the participants said in a way close to the original mode. Here is an example:

> "That's a good question. [a 5-second pause] Erm.
>
> I wonder, I don't know,
>
> I haven't thought of it.
>
> I mean, when one thinks about his or her life,
>
> or think of my father and mother,
>
> there is no one that can replace them.
>
> There is no way.
>
> Not amazing friends, not amazing uncles and family." (Sarah, Christian Egyptian, 38)

In the previous example, the distinction made (as in full-stops, commas, etc.) is done using lines and a few punctuation marks. A new line is given to the new thinking unit or coherent chunk mainly based on the intonation and the understanding of the author.

More importantly, transcription in qualitative research needs to be done with a view to the researcher's epistemology (Roulston, 2010) and the analytical approach to be followed. Mishler (1991: 49) maintains that 'the criteria for choice [of the form of transcription] are theoretical concerns and practical constraints. The mode of transcription adopted should reflect and be sensitive to an investigator's general theoretical model or relations between meaning and speech.' In different analytical approaches, different transcription techniques and conventions are followed. For example, if 'overlaps and pauses' are to be analysed, then transcription should include those. If, however, the themes or notions are the only interesting foci of the research, then a different convention of transcription will be the case. Therefore, Kvale and Brinkmann (2009: 186) advise against the question 'What is the correct

valid transcription?' and instead suggest 'What is a useful transcription for my research purposes?' They continue to explain the need in some research to study the pauses, intonation, and overlaps, while in others it could be the use of language itself, while in others the themes raised in the discussion or the narratives whether in their forms or content. This can even extend to the analysis of the code-switching patterns themselves (Miller, 1983; Heller, 1988; Bradby, 2002). In this specific research, one aim is to establish whether using sacred texts as tools in social research interviews can result in some rich material that can be analysable (in various ways, which in turn will require various transcription conventions to match the analytical approach(es)).

Therefore, some excerpts from the data are presented in this study with the inclusion of the pauses and sometimes with the instances of laughter. Some are presented in a poetry format (for example, Sarah's quote above) and some are presented (with double quotation marks) as part of the sentence within the author's discussion. In some instances, the data excerpts will feature the interviewer's input, and in others it will only be what the interviewee says.

The following chapter (Findings and a Preliminary Commentary) presents the themes in the data and builds the picture of the results found in the qualitative interviews dynamics and content.

Chapter 4 Findings and a Preliminary Commentary

This chapter presents some of the findings based on coding the 28 interviews (a total of 38.8 hours of interview data). Video interviews were coded in NVivo 11, and themes are presented in this section with some extracts from the data.

The findings are linked to the research objectives that this empirical research set out to achieve: namely to:

1. Examine the interview dynamics (including the interviewer–interviewee relationship) where sacred texts are used to start and sustain a discussion.

2. Understand instances where the interviewee shows empowerment and ownership of the discussion.

3. Assess the richness, nuances, and variety of the data gathered in the interviews.

Therefore, the results discussed here are the ones relevant to the dynamics and the nature of the content of interviews where sacred texts were used. The findings are categorised into the following sections: Findings linked to the content (the data or the product of the interview – achieving RO 3 and part of 1), Findings linked to the process (the dynamics of the interviews – ROs 1 and 2), and Findings linked to the conversational partners (the interviewer and the interviewee – RO 1 and part of 2).

It is worth noting here that the three angles from which the findings are presented are not mutually exclusive; much overlap can be observed, and it is the understanding that the content, dynamics, and the actors in any given communicative setting cannot be easily separated except perhaps for the purpose of analysis as is the case in this section.

While the study is qualitative in nature, some references to numerical data may shed some light on the frequency of certain strategies used by the interviewees, which could give some

insights on the dynamics of the interviews; for example, it is noticed that almost all interviewees (26 out of the 28) referred to other parts of the sacred book or teachings (199 instances in total) in comparison to only 15 instances of references to common sayings or famous quotes by celebrities (in eight interviews).

The data were coded in their original video format for notions that featured in the literature discussed before (for example, telling stories, role reversal, and interviewees' references to their feelings); however, most of the codes were created when recurring patterns were noticed in the data (for example, references to other parts of the sacred teachings, figuring out the context of the verses used, and references to notions discussed earlier in the same interview). The codes were then thematically organised. The following section presents the findings in three (possibly overlapping) categories: the what, the how and the who which refer to the content, the dynamics and the conversation partners of the interviews respectively. A list of all codes used to analyse the data in NVivo 11 is in Appendix IX. Manual categorisation of codes into themes was done in more than one version to analyse the dynamics and content in the data (some examples are in Appendices X and XI).

Excerpts quoted from the data are taken word for word from participants, either in English (as they literally appear in the quotes) or translated from the original Arabic (or mixture of Arabic and English) into English.

Some findings are followed by a preliminary commentary that discusses some features and phenomena in the data. This is done in preparation for a deeper and more comprehensive discussion in the next chapter. It can be argued that the distinction between 'Findings' and 'Discussion' is an artificial one; however, for the sake of presenting a balanced weight of data and sufficient discussion of them, they are presented in two separate chapters: 'Chapter 4 Findings and a Preliminary Commentary', and 'Chapter 5 Discussion'. Together, they can be taken to include the data, some observations and the analytical discussion of

what the data mean for the purpose of this research and in answering the Research Question.

4.1 The what – Findings linked to the content of the interview (the data, the product)

This section details the findings that refer to the nature of the content of the interviews. It reports on the features of the interviewees' output that can highlight the extent to which the data produced are:

a) coherent (i.e. where the interview as a whole works as one contextualised communicative setting), and

b) rich (i.e. varied data that can be fruitfully analysed).

4.1.1 Coherent – Were the interviews contextualised?

The following observations suggest that the interviews can be described as having been contextualised, with the context here being spirituality, godly matters, Christianity/Islam, etc. It is worth noting here that those contexts are not the same; however, it was up to the interviewee to locate a context and follow it through in their answers. The following features suggest that each interview was not a set of separate question-and-answer instances; it featured as one communicative interaction that tackled a few notions. In this case, the whole interview setting seemed to serve as one social event and not simply what Mishler (1991: 3) describes as responses that have 'been stripped of its natural social context,' especially that the responses are not to be dealt with as 'isolated' responses to 'isolated' questions.

Following are some features that suggest that the interview settings produced coherent output.

4.1.1.1 References to other parts of the sacred teachings:

One observation that featured in 26 interviews (a total of 199 times) is the reference to other parts of the sacred teachings. This took the form of referring to other verses (by participants

such as Liz (Christian British, 51), Adel (Christian Egyptian, 45), Nancy (Christian Irish, 63), Boules (Christian Egyptian, 19) and Kala (Christian South-East Asian, 46)) which were sometimes even quoted with the exact reference to the chapter and verse number (for example, by Robert (Christian British, 63)) or the reference to some Biblical or Quranic stories (for example, by Omar (Muslim British, 42), Adel and Liz), stories from the life and sayings of the Prophet (Omar, and Hassan (Muslim Egyptian, 41)), quotes attributed to a saint (Robert) or to famous religious writers (Boules), parables told by Jesus (Adel and Robert) or what is understood to be the religious teachings and principles (Liz, Margaret (Christian, British Cypriot, 30), Adel, Robert and Boules). Some of the references were made explicit by, for example, saying, “I know, I know that I can trust God, and, you know, it says in 1 Corinthians 10: 13, that God will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear” (Robert). Robert, here, seems to be supporting his argument that he can trust God by quoting something from another part of the Bible where the text reassures believers that they will not be subject to more than they can bear.

Other references seemed to be made as a matter of fact (the same way one would use a well-known expression without the need to say ‘as the expression goes’). Liz, for example, said,

> “It’s,
>
> Yes, it’s about,
>
> Erm!
>
> ‘Many plans are in a man’s heart, but the Lord directs his steps’,
>
> That’s what I’m gonna have written on my gravestone.”

Adel also said, “Exactly like ‘You are the salt of the earth’, it highlights the same thing.” Adel here refers to another verse from the Bible that tackles “the same thing” in his words, adding more confirmation to his previous explanation.

The direct quotes from other parts of the sacred teachings where the interviewee does not signal that he or she is actually quoting a verse (as in Liz's quote above) or a religious saying were not limited to Christians (who share the same faith with the author, and perhaps may expect him to know that they are quoting from the Bible as in the examples above); Hassan (Muslim Egyptian, 41) used the same technique when he said, "The intention, it's the intention, then. The intention plays a role here, for sure. Your intention makes all the difference. 'The reward of deeds depends upon the intentions.'"

The Hadith (a Prophet's saying) from which the last quote is taken is famous, and it could be presumed that Hassan expected the interviewer to be familiar with it. In other parts of the interview, he explained things more explicitly by using expressions such as "for us", "our religion", and "we even have the commandment …", where "we" and "us" refer to Muslims.

Other references were made with sometimes a warning that the interviewee does not remember the exact phrasing but that the quote was along some lines given (Adel and Kala).

In all cases, referencing other parts of the sacred teachings was not random; it served a specific purpose within the context of that part of the discussion. In some cases, it confirmed what the participant said, and it seemed to add more weight to their opinion (for example, Adel's quote above). It, sometimes, shed some light on another angle of the topic discussed. At other times, it referred to something not specific to the discussion but perhaps applicable to a general notion such as the good intentions behind behaviour or the concept of the general providence of God.

Such referencing to other parts of the sacred teachings or the religious code may in fact indicate that the interviews were indeed anchored in the sacred prompts. This may give some reassurance that the interviews were really contextualised and that the interviewees resorted to other parts (of the same established context: that of spirituality, religion, godly matters, religious morals, or any other context that the interviewee considered important) to carry on what seemed to be a natural discussion.

It is, paradoxically, natural even if quoting other parts of the scriptures involves change of register or level of formality (for example, by code-switching from Egyptian colloquial Arabic to Classical Arabic (to quote the Quran or the Bible) and sometimes from English to an older variety of English) (for example, Robert quotes 'Love the Lord, thy God, with all thy heart' before reverting to everyday, modern English).

It is worth noting that interviewees were not explicitly asked to provide examples, stories, or references from other parts of their sacred book. While they were sometimes asked to provide some personal anecdotes from their life experiences, as far as referencing other verses or relevant teachings it seemed to come naturally to them during the conversation.

One comment to add here is the observation that it is not uncommon for religious speeches and discussions to have references to other parts of the Scripture that support or shed some different light to an argument. This mimicking of an outside-of-the-interview natural setting (that of a religious discussion with fellow believers) adds an element of naturalness to the research dialogue where a participant can use a similar strategy that they can witness at a Friday speech, a Sunday service, a Bible study meeting, etc.

4.1.1.2 Interviewees' attempts to figure out the historical or cultural context

In 23 out of the 28 interviews (a total of 63 times), the interviewees either attempted to figure out the context to understand what a verse meant, or they pointed out in their answers the importance of understanding the historical context of the verse. Some interviewees (such as Liz, Robert, Maryam (Muslim British, 35)) consulted the section where the verse features by looking up the reference in their Bible/Quran. For example, Robert said, "Yeah, let me look that up, because that's one of those verses that I don't immediately know what it means." He then went on to read what was before and after the verse in his Bible. Nancy mentioned that if she had been asked about an unfamiliar verse, she would usually ask to read what comes before and after to figure out the context. Margaret, in trying to articulate what she thought the verse meant, said, "It seems from the context that it's about not trying to get ahead of

yourself." Adel said about one verse, "I see that the verse is but one part of other parts; it's not on its own" in his reference to the need for a more comprehensive understanding of what one verse meant. Robert was of the same opinion when he said, "I don't believe that the Bible can be taken a verse at a time anyway!" saying that he had always been taught to see the whole Bible as a total not as individual verses.

Hassan explained that one verse may not be applicable in today's world (at least in its literal meaning) since the context the verse was given in was different. He went on to explain the historical scene back then when the society was different. Hassan also consulted the Internet on his phone to look up what one verse could mean.

All those attempts to either figure out the context to understand the verse or to point out the importance of the context seem to suggest the contextualisation of the use of the sacred prompts. Even though they are presented to the interviewees as individual prompts, the verses springboarded a discussion that was naturally anchored in a bigger whole of which the interviewees were aware, or they at least sought to figure out what the intended message could be. The confidence of the presence of an underlying sense-making meaning can perhaps be partly given credit for the comfortable environment of the interview. This phenomenon went even further with Boules who started guessing the meaning of a verse by proposing a context, saying, "I will guess now. I haven't understood the context exactly, but perhaps the verse was addressed back then to someone whose parents were against him being with God, for example."

Interviewees were, apparently intuitively, not after the meaning at the word level. They were after the meaning intended by the speaker (God or Allah in this case) which seems consistent with what Relevance Theory (Sperber and Wilson, 2004) suggests. Such meaning-making process seems natural and perhaps matches the way casual conversations are conducted, and it is definitely linked to how believers authentically engage in natural religious discussions. This, in a way, reassures the interviews are not a random set of

questions that may not be linked to anything known to the interviewee. They are, rather, settings where the tools used (the sacred texts) are linked to a bigger whole.

Perhaps the reassurance of having a context is one factor that can lead to a smooth discussion. While participants may not (be expected to) know all the verses in their holy book(s), being familiar with the general gist or message of their spiritual belief can give this confidence in having something to say (or even in some cases something to guess) about the verse under discussion.

4.1.1.3 References to previous verses in this research

Some participants referred to some of the verses that were discussed earlier. For example, Kala said “I guess it’s in connection to the first verse because that one is like stopping at the person giving” in her comment on how doing good deeds can in some cases be self-promoting. In their reference to previously discussed verses, participants seemed to acknowledge that the interview was one unit. They also used this strategy of going back to previous verses to confirm their coherence (for example, Margaret commenting on the notion of comparison that she had mentioned before), adding more weight to their discussion, for example, when saying that good behaviour is all about the intentions or motives and not just about specific actions.

4.1.1.4 References to other sacred codes (other faiths)

While the interviews were conducted only around the interviewee’s respective holy book, some participants referred to other religions. For example, Hussein (Muslim Pakistani, 35) said, “Respect of elders is in every religion; it’s not specific to Islam” in what seems to be stating a social must that goes beyond religions. Other participants (such as Feysal (Muslim British, 30)) commented on his emotional appreciation for Catholicism where he could understand the notion of guilt, which does not seem to be there with Evangelical Christians who seem to pride themselves in being born again, something with which he does not feel comfortable.

While these specific references to other codes of faith served some purposes in the course of the discussion (for example, with Hussein's affirmation that respecting one's elders goes even beyond Islam, and with Feysal speaking of how unjust and ignorant humans can be, which is evident in organised poverty, slavery, etc.), references to other codes of faith seem to suggest that once again the conversation revolved around the spiritual realm where it was possible to bring in even other religious codes to the discussion.

In other interviews (for example, with Omar, a Muslim British), he made a point of mentioning stories about Jesus and pointing out some similarities between Islam and Christianity, and this seemed to be a courteous strategy to show solidarity with the Christian author and his inclusion in the discussion. He, for example, said, "Maged, it's like when Jesus said, 'for those who have not sinned, cast the first stone', meaning I cannot stand the moral high-ground."

Personal Reflection

It could be that those references to other religions such as Christianity when the participant is a Muslim served as a courteous way of including me (the Christian interviewer) in the dialogue. The reason for this note is that this phenomenon did not feature in interviews with Christians; there were not overly positive references to Islam, for example. Perhaps Christian interviewees discussing Biblical verses with a Christian interviewer did not feel the need to bring to the discussion something that did not seem to fit (i.e. reference to another religion neither of the speakers subscribed to). In adapting one's speech to accommodate his or her listener, one would search for common interests, values, etc., and perhaps an interview with someone from a different religious background can be more advantageous in bringing such richness.

4.1.1.5 Referring to notions discussed earlier in the interview

More than once, some interviewees referred to a topic or idea mentioned earlier during the interview. Such references can suggest that the interviews ran smoothly in what could be

described as a common occurrence in casual discussions. In less natural situations (or more formal settings such as job interviews), interviewees may be more likely to handle questions separately, and there could be a tendency to go through questions one by one without linking answers to what has been previously covered.

For example, Liz went back to the book whose plot she had used a few minutes earlier to answer a previous question. Margaret noted that there was “some comparison again” in her attempt to figure out the meaning of another verse. She also commented saying, “going back to modesty, that thing of modesty” which was something she had raised about half an hour earlier in the interview. “It’s making me think about the love thing again” was another instance of her linking a current answer to something that had been discussed earlier.

Omar expressed this by saying, “and going back to what I was saying earlier as in you got those poor people”. Towards the end of the interview he linked one answer back to a story he had told, saying, “…like my sister? She got involved. She did not walk by.” In a similar way, Nancy said, “…the son who did the pillow thing” referring to a story she had told earlier. So did Yasmine (Muslim half-British half-Pakistani/Bengali, 18) saying, “Yeah, you know the cousin [whose] birthday is today?” using a story she told earlier in the interview to comment on a new theme.

Robert, in repeating a verse he quoted, said, “It’s like I said to you before […] if people ask, I’m happy to give an answer.” Hassan also used the example he had given before one verse to confirm his right understanding, saying, “…like I told you, you become a role model”. More than 30 minutes after mentioning the type of social system with which he felt comfortable, he came back to the idea saying, “Like I already told you before, I like for the social system to be conservative” only to go back to the concept again about 17 minutes later to say, “…because I’m only a human; haven’t I told you that I wanted a conservative society so there could be some good discipline?”

These references to issues discussed earlier in the interviews seem to show the coherence of the interviewees' responses (or at least their attempt to sound coherent) and the tendency in natural conversations to present ideas and thoughts consistently. It can also point out the fact that with the various verses, the whole interview worked as one social event, and that that social event was one unit anchored in a context even with multiple different verses. Fluid as it was, such a context still served the purpose of linking ideas together providing the interviewees with a chance to produce what can seem to be coherent exchanges.

4.1.2 Rich – Were the sacred texts useful in holding and sustaining a rich and varied discussion? (Can they help produce data that can be analysable?)

This section presents some observations linked to the richness of the data. Rich data can be understood to mean data varied and nuanced enough to be analysable in qualitative studies based on each research aim.

4.1.2.1 More comprehensive understanding

Interviewees, rather than seeing the sets of verses as contrasting, handled the concepts triggered by the verses in ways that showed a more comprehensive understanding. For example, as far as giving to the needy (where one verse encourages 'letting one's light shine' with good deeds while the other promotes 'not letting one's left hand know what their right hand does') (and their parallel verses from the Quran), interviewees talked about the intention or the purpose behind doing good deeds (for example, Hassan, Boules, Margaret and Omar). A balance was promoted by Liz, where one should not boast about giving while at the same time one does not have to be extremely secretive about it. The same deeper understanding was provided by Liz, where she explains that "honour your father and mother, yes, but still the one who is more important in your life is God". So, it was clear that rather than discarding one verse or the other, interviewees presented a more balanced understanding that combined different aspects of the same notion.

Margaret did not hide her observation that there was some contradiction between two verses, but she added that some compromise was needed where the intention behind doing good deeds plays an important role. Omar gave a practical example of such a compromise when he told a story about his mum agreeing with her son-in-law's request for her daughter to wear the niqab (the full-face cover) after marriage, even though the mother herself did not personally encourage it. Boules saw the contrasting nature between verses as an indication that they "complement each other". Feysal also commented on the richness of the Quran where a range of meaning exists in what seems to be a set of contrasting verses, and he favourably commended the selection of verses that covered a spectrum rather than single angles.

It is clear from most interviews that participants spoke of a deeper meaning to the verses. Some answers were phrased in, "You should help those in need, but you shouldn't be overt about it" (Robert). This 'yes, but' or 'no, but' can point to the practical (rather than theoretical/idealistic) approaches of the interviewees in understanding and discussing the verses. Hassan even phrased it more explicitly by saying, "It's good and not good," and he continued to explain that giving to the needy in public can be good if it sets a model for others to do the same, but it can be bad if the purpose behind it is to boast.

Sacred texts seem to carry some expectation of richness and depth that can lead faith followers to meditate and invest time and effort to comprehend what the text could be saying. Those religious extracts seemed to offer this mileage of possibilities of meaning, which in itself could be one factor in sustaining the discussion for an average of twelve minutes per verse.

The beyond-the-physical nature of sacred texts gives them the licence to have meanings deeper, wider, and more flexible than the literal 'either/or' or 'yes/no'. This in itself can lead to longer discussions that feature 'yes, but' and 'no, but', which in turn can allow participants to

express themselves and show their thinking patterns, cultural tendencies, and individual differences, leading to rich data analysable in many ways.

4.1.2.2 The possibility of different interpretation (or misinterpretation) of sacred texts

In at least 18 out of the 28 interviews, participants referred (at least 56 times) to the possibility of multiple interpretations of the sacred texts in question. Some (such as Hind (Muslim Arab, 30)) were critical of the fact that some sacred texts can be misinterpreted and misused to serve some people's agendas (for example, to convince some women that wearing the hijab is a religious rather than cultural obligation). Others seemed to suggest that part of the sacredness of the holy books is that they allow faith followers to find something relevant to each one based on his or her background and preferences.

This feature suggests that sacred texts are versatile enough to be used with different people at different situations and perhaps even more than once (possibly with the same participants).

4.1.2.3 References to famous sayings, movies, and world events

Some participants referred to famous sayings (such as Talia (Christian Rwandan, 34) and Kala) or proverbs (such as Hind) or some movie lines (Hassan) where they confirmed their opinions by citing a quote such as 'actions speak louder than words' (Talia and Kala). Such a strategy seems to mimic natural conversations where one could be prompted to recite a saying to succinctly confirm one's ideas.

4.1.2.4 Interviewees giving practical and hypothetical examples

Examples given by interviewees, on the course of the discussion, varied between practical and hypothetical examples. Most practical examples were from real-life experiences in their professional or personal circles.

Omar, for example, talked about helping his mum with her shopping, and drew examples from his conversations with students and colleagues in the workplace. Adel said, "I used to get my dad his favourite meatballs" in his discussion about how children can honour their

parents. Nancy drew on some specific examples from the care home she used to run, her discussions with students in Luton and her conversations with her children. Robert mentioned a few examples of situations facing the charity he helps running and a fund-raising event they had. He also provided examples from his family life and some of the decisions that he and his wife have taken in the past to care for his mum and to connect with their siblings.

Hassan spoke about how he contributes to charity work with some specific details of places and approaches (for example, he would give money to trusted individuals in the mosque he goes to). He also spoke about his phone calls to his dad and mum when he was abroad. Boules talked about two initiatives that he helped with and also talked about specific political campaigns of which he was part. He also mentioned how he and his friends prefer to deal with homeless children when they approach them for money.

Hypothetical examples were given in response to the interviewer's asking directly along the what-if lines, but they were also sometimes volunteered. Adel gave an example of siblings not sharing a similar educational attainment, but they can still enjoy a discussion over a football game on TV. He also talked hypothetically about how excited an elderly father could feel if he lived with the family and not in a care home, saying, "he can cheer up for his favourite team when Ahly and Zamalek [famous Egyptian football teams] play". Robert imagined what he would have done if his parents had asked him to honour them by agreeing to marry somebody he did not know (he said he would not have agreed). Hassan thought about what he would feel like if his brother decided to leave Islam and provided what he thought would be his reaction. He carried on in the discussion to say, "if I had been born in your family, a Christian family, I would be a Christian" along the course of his argument that very rarely do people question their religious beliefs in a way that allows them to 'really' choose. Boules put himself in the shoes of children whose parents are not as flexible as his are. He provided the way that he thought he would react in that hypothetical situation. Aya (Muslim Arab, 36) reflected on what would happen if her daughter decided to get married

and to what extent her parents (the girl's grandparents) would be involved in the decision making.

While it could be argued that real practical examples carry more credibility in comparison with hypothetical ones, it could also be argued that in day-to-day conversations, speakers can sometimes resort to hypothetical scenarios to better express a thought and/or show to what extent they assent to a specific principle. They may not, however, do what they think they would; but this is beside the point. The point here is that hypothetical discussions are an integral part of many natural casual conversations, and human language lends itself to discussions about hypothetical and imaginative scenarios.

4.1.2.5 Interviewees sometimes provided some abstract ideas.

In some responses, interviewees gave what seemed to be abstract ideas that are either theoretical or philosophical. Some ideas were linked to the general philosophy of the interviewee's faith (Christianity or Islam). Six out of the 28 interviewees tackled some abstract ideas at length (a total of 13 times). For example, Teresa (Christian half-British half-Sicilian, 21) maintained that it is difficult to measure whom to love more (God or parents) since the love given to parents reflects God's love since "He is part of my love [to others]". Boules had a similar opinion in his explanation of the same verse where he said that parents should be number one in his life, followed by his studies, then his friends and that "God is in all of them." Liz had a different view and said that in one's life, priorities need to be in place and that can be done when you put "God first, others second, yourself last. In fact there is an acronym 'JOY': Jesus first, others second, and then yourself."

In comparison with practical examples where the interviewee mentions a specific thing that happened to them and hypothetical examples where the interviewee can imagine what he or she would do in a given situation, abstract ideas seem to revolve around the intangible (such as putting God first). Such ideas seem to lead to what could be described as an idealistic

(and perhaps parsimonious) presentation of a moral concept or what Barrett (1996) termed 'theologically correct' ideas that may or may not materialise in one's life.

4.1.2.6 Referring to culture

Interviewees were aware of having a cultural identity and they were also aware that they had some insights into their own cultures or the cultures with which they came in contact. They seemed to have the licence to explain how their culture of origin perceives certain practices and ideas and how this could be possibly different to people from other cultures.

There were 72 references to culture in 19 out of the 28 interviews. Kala referred to how travelling abroad was seen in the part of the South-East Asian world from where she comes. She also referred to the similarities between parts of the culture of Old Testament Israel (in the Bible) and that "some cultures are still doing that" referring to the fact that some extended families live together in the same big house in some parts of the world.

Some participants referred to the cultural projections in understanding excerpts from sacred texts, and some (for example, Robert) were aware that, for example, honouring parents in the West may take a form different to that observed in countries such as India.

Moreover, Hind seemed to suggest that culture and religion are so close that she even seemed to use the two terms interchangeably in one of her answers, saying, "Yes, in Ramadan, I fast. I try to pray. I try to keep the culture or keep my religion actually; for example, not to be with a boyfriend, for example; I don't believe in this." However, in a later discussion in the interview, she referred to a piece of research she did herself where she investigated the dynamics of women's choices to wear the hijab in one Middle Eastern capital, and the conclusion was that women chose to wear the hijab for cultural not religious reasons. She mentioned this in her discussion around why she herself does not wear the hijab. She maintained that if the hijab was an obligation, "it could have been mentioned in the Quran, but it is all interpretations." Mirium (Muslim British born to a Pakistani family, 30)

referred to the same link between culture and religion when she said, “and in our culture and even the religion” getting advice from the family is a serious thing.

Talia (Christian Rwandan) explained how she, perhaps subconsciously, consulted her cultural norms when assessing the real need of somebody who said he was Kenyan who approached her asking for money to buy some food. In her explanation, she was clear that her evaluation involved culture. She said, “I saw the need. In my culture, first a man, and someone who is older than you, will not ask for something.” Some participants (Aya, Maryam and Hind) also referred to the differences between their culture and that of the author.

It seems that one’s culture is always a source ready to be drawn upon when asked about social issues, even when the issues are taken from a religious text. Perhaps similar to one’s sacred text, one’s culture is something that can be personal, and one can have the ‘licence’ as an expert to present angles of his or her culture.

4.1.2.7 The interviewees refer to specific life events where the verses were consulted or relevant

Some interviewees were prompted by one or more of the very verses and remembered certain situations they went through where the verse was consulted. Mohammad (Muslim Egyptian, 23) mentioned a discussion he had with his father about what type of sacrifice to offer during Eid time now that they had better financial resources. He maintained that his father was of the opinion that they should proclaim the grace of their Lord (quoting the same verse used in the interview) by offering a bigger sacrifice as a token of gratitude and to show others how gracious Allah has been to them.

While looking on her phone for the verses before and after, Maryam said, “I love the way my son reads this Sura as well.” The Quran is formed of Suras, and when she saw the reference on the verse under discussion she was reminded of her son’s Quran reciting. This smoothly led the direction of the discussion to the training her son had to read the Quran with a voice “in such a way that soothes you” in her words.

Nancy commented on ‘Honor your father and your mother’ saying, “[laughter] It’s one I frequently quote to my son [laughter],” and she carried on discussing some of the heated debates that she, her daughter, and her son sometimes have regarding the suffering in the world and the role of God in that.

4.1.2.8 Telling stories

Almost all interviews (26 out of the 28) included stories told by the interviewees. There were 169 instances of stories in the 26 interviews, and the length of stories varies from one interviewee to another and within the same interview.

The stories told by the interviewees were mainly used to explain a point or to give examples supporting their opinions. Some stories were prompted by the interviewer’s asking for an example, anecdote or a story. However, most stories were spontaneously told in the course of the discussion. The stories included plots from books (Liz), exchanges the participant had with friends (Liz, Omar and Hassan), some family discussions (Omar, Hassan, Kala, Nancy and Aya), some incidents that happened to or with family members (Omar, Robert, Talia and Nancy), some phases of their spiritual lives (Liz, Nancy, Robert, Kala, Sarah (Christian Egyptian, 38) and Aya), some incidents in their work environments (Liz, Nancy, Omar, Robert and Hassan), some bereavement in the family (Margaret and Talia), some stages in their upbringing (Omar, Boules and Medhat (Christian Egyptian, 27)), and some incidents from their childhood (Adel and Nancy).

The degree of the sensitivity of the stories also varied. Some stories included a death of a family member (Margaret and Talia), the involvement of the police and social services (Nancy), the financial contribution to charities and helping the poor (Hassan, Robert and Boules), personal differences with parents (Nancy, Teresa and Yasmine), difficult discussions with children (Nancy and Aya), family decisions (Robert), work instability (Robert) and some stories involved some danger associated with political and social opinions and events (especially around the 2011 Revolution in Egypt) (Boules). Separation

of parents, difficulties in interaction with one parent and history of cheating in the family were also among the themes that emerged during some interviews.

Story telling can be seen as common in casual dialogues where an anecdote can summarise an argument succinctly and add an element of taught lessons from the past. Stories (and the way they are structured) can tell a lot about the participant's thinking patterns, ideals and culture and can open a window to parts of their identities (McAdams and McLean, 2013). While story telling *per se* may not be directly (or exclusively) linked to sacred-texts-based research interviews, the observation that many stories were told in this piece of research points out the familiar setting of the interview which may have triggered telling a story (the same way a casual discussion may).

Data that have stories provide a rich source for analysis especially in narrative analysis. The way the story develops, what the climax is, and who the heroes are can tell much about the story teller and can also provide some insights of the values that the story was used to reflect. Stories that involve talking about one's emotions can also enrich the data, depending on the aim of each research as far as the analysis strategy is concerned.

4.1.2.9 References to professional or personal Issues

Most examples, stories, or topics tackled by the interviewees do not seem to be culture-specific or gender specific *per se*. They, however, seem to have a personal nature. This is not to exclude the cultural and gender elements from that personal nature. Following are some examples.

Interviewees who are academics (for example, Liz, Margaret, Feysal, Aya, Mirium and Hind) commented using some academic and research notions (by, for example, arguing what a definition of a notion could be, or by talking about observation and other things typical of the discourse used in a lot of academic discussions or by referencing well-known international relations/economic theories). Practical examples also included personal references. For example, Margaret (who said she is single) touched upon the Greek society's expectations

of a certain age for girls to be married. Talking about parents also seemed to trigger personal experiences that did not seem to be consistent only across national cultural lines (but consistent with the individual's personal circumstances). This was clearly seen in the assumed age of parents – which the verse commanding honouring does not specify – for example: with the younger group discussing the role of their parents in their life choices while the older group thought of parents as elderly mothers and fathers. One's professional interests and careers also painted some examples given by interviewees: for example, Nancy who ran a care home talked in several instances about the elderly, and so did Robert whose elderly mom passed away a year ago; on the other hand, Boules who is 19 years old talked about parent–child discussions around careers and university choices, and Yasmine (19) and Nabila (Muslim, British-Pakistani, 18) talked about university life. Interviewees whose careers involve dealing with language (such as Liz, Margaret, and Hassan) also commented on "hedging language," "interpreting texts," and "intonation" as part of their discussions triggered during the interview.

While it is understandable that interviewees in general would find it easier to give real examples (and hence the professional or personal nature of such examples), it can be noticed that such examples point to the natural flow of the conversation in these interviews (which is discussed in detail later). Rather than giving idealistic answers about what is expected to be done, the interviewees looked for and gave real-life examples, and these examples differed in the same way that the backgrounds of the interviewees did.

This can suggest that while the interviews can be described as having been contextualised in a domain (selected by each interviewee: for example, the domain of spirituality, or the domain of God, etc.), this does not rule out the personal nature of that contextualisation: a feature of sacred texts that had been the basis of the initial theoretical assumption of their potential fruitful use in social research interviews: namely, their transcultural as well as personal nature. The personal emotional attachment to one's sacred book can result in an interview that is full of personal references, examples and applications. For example, Kala's

interview revolved more or less around her role as foster carer, which seemed to be a significant part of her life. Examples of leaving a legacy, honouring one's parents and God's providence seemed to focus back on fostering and some practical examples around it, such as what she did before Mother's Day and some other practical arrangements in her other part-time commitments to fit around her foster care role. It is worth noting that she was not approached as a potential research participant in her capacity as foster carer.

4.1.2.10 A variety of topics discussed across interviews

The interviews tackled themes and topics that had not been thought of by the author to be of direct relevance to the selected sets of verses during the research design stage. While the three sets of verses were selected to roughly represent three generic social circles (namely: doing good to others, attitudes to parents, and self-worth), the various topics discussed in the interviews spanned different social themes that were not limited to such three circles. Examples of the topics discussed include: the genocide in Rwanda (Talia), world poverty and resource allocation (Feysal), intentions and their influence on behaviour (Hassan), adoption and fostering (Kala), international relations (Feysal), the environment (Mirium), wearing religious dress such as the hijab (Hind, Mirium and Maryam), time perception in society (Nardine, Christian Egyptian, 57), refugees and laws (Nancy), bad habits such as smoking (Shenouda, Christian Egyptian, 22), women's empowerment (Mirium and Maryam), teaching and passing knowledge (Mirium), care homes (Nancy), the Islamic State (Hind) and politics (Nabila), among other topics.

This wide range of topics discussed can serve best in exploratory studies and in studies with the initial focus on finding out what can be of importance to participants before narrowing down a social study. For example, it was enlightening when Talia expressed that she would honour her fathers and mothers (in the plural) since she moved from one home to another and was raised by several fathers and mothers due to the Rwandan genocide that caused the death of her family. This theme can intrigue a future researcher to follow the lead and investigate such dynamics of parenthood or perceived parenthood in conflict and post-

conflict regions, a theme that might not have crossed the mind of a non-Rwandan researcher.

4.2 The how – Findings linked to the process of the interview (the dynamics)

This section details the findings that refer to the interview dynamics. It reports on the process of the interviews which can highlight the extent to which the interviews were:

a) genuine (i.e. where the interview ran like a naturally flowing casual conversation that shows honesty), and

b) owned by the interviewee (i.e. where the interviewee showed empowerment).

4.2.1 Genuine – Did the interviews run as easily flowing casual conversations (natural and honest)?

4.2.1.1 Interviewee feels the discussion was natural or comfortable

Of the 28 interviewees, 26 explicitly commented on having found the interview comfortable and/or natural (a total of 61 times). Liz said that the conversation was like a “chat in the pub”, and Margaret felt the dialogue was real. Omar said that he enjoyed the interview, and Hassan, in one part of the interview, likened the conversation to the ones that the Prophet had with people asking about Islam and the faith (which seems to suggest that the conversation had a natural or real-life feel to it). Robert preferred being interviewed by a Christian as he would explain things in the same way he would “to fellow Christians in my Bible study group.” Hassan said that he “didn’t feel under pressure” as he was able to give his opinions to the best of his knowledge even if they did not represent the official interpretation of the verses. He added, “I was myself.” He reported that he did not worry because “it is not an exam. We’re just chatting, so it is just a chat. I didn’t even prepare myself by asking you questions [before the interview]”.

Boules expressed his comfort by saying, “I enjoyed it very much. You’ve made me produce organised answers. If I had been asked the questions in the conventional way, I feel I wouldn’t have been able to gather my thoughts the way I did.” Hind also commented on feeling free to express her own personal opinions, and Mohammad even went further to say, “I feel I’ve enjoyed myself. If you have more verses, erm., prepare more verses and let’s discuss them; it’s nice!” And at the end of the interview, he said, “I enjoyed myself; I can do another [interview].”

Medhat expressed that he was not bored by saying, “Not at all! You make me think of things I’ve never thought about before,” and Rosaline (Christian Indian, 30) said that she was nervous before the interview but added, “throughout this interview I was, I was comfortable.” In a dialogue with Nabila, she expressed her comfort as follows:

> “**Nabila:** You’re very friendly, thank you, and I put forward my, like, what I had to say,
>
> my opinions very openly. I didn’t have to think about what I’m gonna say. I just said whatever came to my head.
>
> **Interviewer:** So, did you feel comfortable during the interview itself?
>
> **Nabila:** I felt very comfortable, hence I was able to say my opinions openly, yeah.”

4.2.1.2 Laughter

Laughter was also part of the interviews. In at least 19 of the 28 interviews, there was a total of 50 instances of laughter, which may suggest that the general interview setting was pleasant and not tense. It could be feared that in discussing sacred texts (with the high stakes that this entails), the interview may have a general formal (or even negative) feel; however, the presence of some laughter and light-hearted comments may indicate that the general atmosphere was positive and relaxing. This was true in cases of interviewees who shared the same faith with the interviewer and in others where they belonged to a different religion. However, this could also be a feature of the participants themselves who were open enough to be willing to share their personal religious beliefs in a research interview setting.

4.2.1.3 Interviewee says they digress

There were some instances where interviewees said that they felt they digressed from the point of discussion. While there could be some real digression, the question will always be digression from what. It is believed that since the interview setting aimed at giving the interviewee control over their choices of stories, examples and things to discuss, perhaps digression can in fact evidence the nature of a discussion that is conducted in a conversation-like manner. After all, many natural casual conversations do digress when conversation partners feel comfortable enough to change the direction of the discussion to something they remember or find more relevant at a given moment.

For example, when Nabila was discussing her involvement with charity work, she started mentioning some details of how she encouraged her team at school to raise more funds, and while she was mentioning some of those details, she said, "…I, I don't like going door-to-door, I think. I don't find it insulting, but I just think that, erm, that's a whole different topic, but the thing we did was selling stuff." In this example, perhaps Nabila was aware of the importance of the research interview that she wanted to be helpful by perhaps being 'focused'. However, following her train of thought where she expressed what she thought of going door-to-door to promote charity work made her feel that it is "a whole different topic". In discussing the sixth verse that says, '…and man bore it; he was unjust and ignorant,' the discussion went on to give some examples of ignorance and unjust practices in the world. Nabila continued and talked about some world affairs and said, "… and the fact that he got elected to be a president, I think that's just pure ignorance, because of people who voted for him. Yeah, fine; the opposition wasn't that great; we're going to politics here [laughter]". It seems that she was alerted to the fact that the discussion has taken a political turn although the research was not about politics, and she seemed to be apologetic about it.

The same sensitivity featured when Mirium said, "I don't know if I've gone off topic", and that is another example that reflects the good intentions of interviewees in general in trying to be helpful by sticking to the topic at hand. Feysal expressed that there were a lot of ideas going

on in his head, and he in fact waved with his hands expressing some branching off and different directions.

Nardine was commenting on how punctual she is in a society that does not seem, in her opinion, to value time. The context in that part of the interview was about whether to plan or to simply depend on God's provision, so she said,

> "… and you have then to know how tortured I am in Egypt, Maged [laughter],
>
> I am really tortured in Egypt because no one plans,
>
> and no one sets appointments to the exact five minutes,
>
> so I really struggle,
>
> but anyway! This is not our topic."

Here it is clear that the interviewee felt that focusing on herself and her struggle in a culture that does not seem to value planning seemed to have taken some time of the interview while it was not the topic (whether she was struggling or not). A few minutes later in the same interview, she told the interviewer about planning her flights. She expressed her fear of flying saying that she is expecting her life to end in a flight crash. She carried on to say, "… and I'm flying to the USA in June [a pause]. I don't know why I'm telling you this story [a pause], erm. Anyway! I plan to travel and everything, and my friend and I are planning what we're going to do there and so on, and these plans may not materialise, but [a pause], OK! We will plan, and whatever happens happens, and still 'What is your life, it is like a mist'". This spontaneous storytelling seems to suggest a natural dynamic where the interviewee was triggered to say what came to her mind at that moment, and this feature makes her output seem credible.

Digression is an interesting notion that can still be seen through the Relevance Theory lens. According to Relevance Theory (Sperber and Wilson, 2004), the interviewees, in giving their answers, act as speakers who would in general adjust their speech to cater for their hearer (the interviewer), i.e. to produce utterances relevant to the hearer's purposes (in this case,

the focus of the research). Digression is described as such when what is said (or the length at which something is discussed) is not relevant to the hearer (the interviewer) but perhaps is still relevant to the interviewee (the speaker), otherwise it would not have been said. Digression, seen from this lens, would in fact indicate that the interviewee was comfortable enough that he or she produced something at length that they thought might not be relevant to the interviewer (but it was relevant enough to the interviewee to mention).

4.2.1.4 Reference to something that may paint the interviewee in some negative light

Some stories or examples mentioned by the interviewees seemed to paint them in some negative light based on their own assessment. For example, Mohammad reported on unnecessarily snapping at his mother who accidentally stepped on his sore foot. His own retelling of the story included his dissatisfaction with the way he shouted at her on his way to his room slamming the door. He was telling this example while explaining what honouring parents should (not) be like. Mostapha (Muslim Egyptian, 29) also felt that he is not able to apply the verse commanding him to be dutiful to his parents when it comes to his father, and he continued to say, “this is something that I don’t consider being dutiful, to be honest.”

Hussein referred to a situation where he was tricked into donating some money to a fraudster, and Sarah recounted her wrong use of some Biblical verses and concepts to tell her mother of the decision to go abroad on ministry. She was recounting some other similar situations and commented, “…that was when I was going crazy a little bit [laughter]”.

Some other interviewees referred to some cultural and/or religious practices that they do not feel comfortable following (for example, not being able to honour one of their parents because of what he or she did or because of the nature of the relationship as it stands at the moment) (Yasmine and Teresa).

4.2.1.5 Interviewee mentions that they have never thought of the question or that the verses made them think

In six interviews (a total of seven instances), the interviewees articulated that they had never thought of the question (or of what the verse meant) before the interview.

In his answer to whether he was ready for the third verse or whether he was bored, Medhat said, “Not at all! You make me think of things I’ve never thought about before.”

Commenting on the interview as a whole, Feysal said,

> “Again, it was fascinating and interesting for me as well.
>
> You’d think that in this kind of interview situation,
>
> that it would be just giving answers,
>
> but these answers are things that I don’t, you don’t, often think about it
>
> till you’re asked,
>
> so it’s fascinating to be asked some of these questions
>
> and also to ponder upon: ‘so what is my position?’
>
> ‘what are my feelings on this?’
>
> so it was, it was equally, equally interesting.”

“I’ve never looked at it in this much detail” is what Maryam said while discussing one verse. She said that she would usually pass over some verses without analysing them in such depth that was applied during the interview.

This feature is favourable since: a) the interviewee’s thinking pattern can be observed while they are getting their head around the meaning of a verse, and b) it excludes the possibility of an artificial pre-arranged answer (what Rubin and Rubin call ‘party lines’, 2012: 35) that could be idealistic or socially desirable without indeed reflecting the interviewee’s personal understanding. It can also be satisfying to the interviewees if they think about something of

value to them for the first time in such depth that can help them reach new insights or deeper understanding of their sacred texts.

When given the verse of 'And indeed We have honoured the Children of Adam', Mirium said, "Erm. That's a tough one. [a long pause: nine seconds] I don't know if I've really thought about that in my life." In such a situation, the discussion still went on, and the interviewee was encouraged to think of what it could mean. From a practical point of view, having something to look at (a laminated, typed verse) perhaps helped ease the feeling of the long nine-second pause since the interviewee was focusing on something externalised (instead of trying to think on the spot while gazing at the interviewer, the ceiling, etc.).

Medhat (Egyptian, 27) said, "I'm glad you made me think. There are some things that I haven't thought about before or linked them to my childhood, for example. There are things that I haven't stopped one point at a time to think about, but I'm glad you selected controversial verses. Those verses are important and need people to think about, and I'm glad you asked me for my personal rather than official opinions."

The fact that each verse was presented to the interviewee in a laminated form gave them a chance to take their time to read and think of the verse. Hussein commented on this very feature expressing that the usual interviews may not allow participants to think as they are usually expected to give an answer once the interviewer has finished saying the question.

Some interviewees took their time to look up a passage on their mobile phones (for example, Maryam, Liz and Hassan) or in their hard copies (Robert) either to read the rest of the chapter where the verse features or to search for some explanation by scholars (Hassan).

In 14 out of the 28 interviews (a total of 32 instances), the interviewee either seemed to be thinking of the answer on the spot or in fact articulated that they were trying to figure out what the verse meant. Kala said, "Yeah, well, yeah, yeah [a 3-second pause], I'm just trying to think 'when was the last time I've done like a generous giving that I concealed, you know?'". Sarah said, "perhaps something that came to my mind while we were talking now,

the number one reason for people leaving Christianity, leaving the mission field, is relationship one another as Christians." In her response to another question about what is so special about fathers and mothers for the verse to command their honouring, Sarah responded saying,

> "That's a good question. [a 5-second pause] Erm.
>
> I wonder, I don't know,
>
> I haven't thought of it.
>
> I mean, when one thinks about his or her life,
>
> or think of my father and mother,
>
> there is no one that can replace them.
>
> There is no way.
>
> Not amazing friends, not amazing uncles and family."

Sarah continued her thinking and articulating what she seemed to be thinking at the moment (perhaps arriving at some new insights), and this can be evidenced by her saying, "Erm. I wonder, because perhaps the image, the image of God in, I wonder, this is not something, I'm just thinking with you like that. Whether the image of God in, in in our minds is formed through our father and mother. Like God the Father or the father, God the Mother or the Holy Spirit, or the motherhood of God, like that." Sarah's articulation of her thinking-on-the-spot can be seen in the somehow fragments of sentences and also in her explicit "I'm just thinking with you like that" which perhaps evidences that she did not have a pre-prepared answer.

4.2.1.6 Interviewee finds the verse(s) morally challenging

In seven interviews, there were seven instances where the interviewee found the verse somehow challenging. In those instances, interviewees seemed to compare their lived experiences with the commandments in the verses discussed. For example, after reading

the verse ‘And that you be dutiful to your parents,’ Mirium said, “Erm. I’m trying to remember, I’m trying to think ‘do I live my life like that?’ [laughter], because I’m quite outspoken.”

In these moments of finding the verse morally challenging, the discussions seemed to take a more honest turn where the interviewees were thinking aloud about whether they measured up to the standards given by the religious text. This can perhaps link to some instances where the interviewee referred to some anecdotes that could paint them in a negative light (in the light of the high-standard commandment). Mirium continued to think whether she lived her life the way the verse commanded, and she said, “… but, I, I hope I, I think there’s loads of decisions that I’ve made in my life that my parents might not have been happy with, and I’ve known that when I’ve made those decisions. But I’ve done them because I thought they were right. So, I completely, I agree with that statement [the verse]. I would never do anything that would really harm my parents.” She then continued to explain what she described as “a struggle” being from a Pakistani culture (but she herself was born in the UK) and that both cultures (even that her family is not a traditional Pakistani family according to her description) do not seem to see individual decisions the same way. To reconcile both, she said, “For me, even though I make my own decisions, I’d always discuss it with the family.” She also compared the dynamics of her family (where the children are independent despite being from a Pakistani family) with incidents from two other families where the children were not supportive of or kind to their mothers, and she seemed to bring this example to mean that while she herself may not be completely and literally abiding by the verse, she still followed the essence of honouring parents. She captured that in saying, “I try to be dutiful, but I’m very strong minded as well.”

While most of the interviewees who found the verses challenging thought so with the general impression that one can never apply the religious commandments to their fullness, one exception was Mostapha who had some feelings of guilt around the commandment to ‘be dutiful to one’s parents’ as he explained, referring to his father, saying, “I don’t apply the verse to the end. Because I sometimes talk with him [my father] angrily. Sometimes, I tell

him something to his face the way I feel it. Without softening it and without making it sound nicer and without beautifying it. For example, I can tell him that he is egotistical. This is something that I don't consider being dutiful, to be honest." Mostapha went on to compare that with what he used to do in the past when he was able to cope with the problems with his father by simply being silent, but that he could not do that any longer.

Personal Reflection

It was important for me to examine Mostapha's (Muslim Egyptian, 29) perception of the interview. One reason was that he initially did not feel comfortable with the term 'challenge' that I used while giving him some background about the nature of the interview (where I may ask questions that seem to challenge what he says), and another perhaps because of his reference to the difficulty that he had applying 'be dutiful to your parents' with his father. It was important for me to see whether he left the interview with any negative feelings, so I could improve my interviewing techniques in the future. I thought the best way to ask for his feedback was to ask him to email me what he thought of the interview (and in such a medium he would not have to tell me to my face over Skype how he felt). Here is an excerpt (translated from Arabic) of what he said in his email:

> 'I was comfortable and relaxed during the interview. I felt I was welcomed by you and by your manner, which made me say what I had, because I felt that the same way I was welcomed, all my thoughts were also welcomed. This indeed happened in the interview when you received all I said without any reservations or sudden expressions in response to what I said. … I believe that talking about religion in our Egyptian society – and in the Arab society in general – is thorny and sensitive; however, I didn't feel so during the interview, and I had the freedom to talk and say my idea comfortably.'

I was glad to read that.

4.2.1.7 Interviewees expressing special emotions towards some verses or during the discussion

Eleven out of the 28 interviewees expressed special emotions they had towards some of the verses (or the sections in the holy book where the verses were taken from) in a total of 32 instances. Liz mentioned that she loves Matthew chapters 5 and 6 (Jesus' Sermon on the Mount), and she also loves Psalm 8 which reminds her of a Christian song whose melody is put to the lyrics of the psalm. Adel mentioned that the verse taken from Matthew 5 is one of the verses that he considers "important". Nancy said that "Matthew is probably one of my favourite books. Matthew and James are of my favourite books in the New Testament. I like Matthew a lot." Commenting on the selection of the verses used in the research, Nancy expressed her comfort that she was familiar with the six verses, saying, "…these are all ones that I've read before, and thought about before, so they are internalised."

Mostapha had some feelings of guilt because he is not able to apply being dutiful to the end when it comes to dealing with his father, as there are some problems between them. Mostapha also felt that the verse 'And indeed We have honoured the Children of Adam' sometimes troubles him as he sees that some humans do not exhibit such honouring in their behaviour. Feysal commented on one verse saying, "this is the kind of verse which used to trouble me because it seems so blanket, black and white," and he continued to explain how he would read different explanations of such verses and that he would usually feel more comfortable when the verse is explained in its historical context about specific events.

Medhat explained the stages that he went through with some verses and how some of them were explained to him as a child in Sunday School classes. He expressed the change of his understanding from the literal (or sometimes typical) explanation of verses such as the ones about the good deeds or the one about honouring parents (which meant a lot of things including being successful at school, being polite, always listening to what parents say, etc.) to a more comprehensive understanding of being more human. Some of the emotions

prompted by the verses used with Medhat also prompted some memories of his upbringing where he came to the knowledge of the verses in his formative years.

Some participants liked the notion tackled in the verse (such as Feysal, for example, liking the richness of the verse that talks about giving to the needy while concealing the good deed). With another verse, Feysal said, “this is a lovely verse; I think this is part of the Quran which I enjoy reading in terms of spiritual and emotional sustenance” commenting on ‘And indeed We have honoured the Children of Adam’.

Some parts of the interview prompted talking about negative feelings, not necessarily linked to the very verses discussed but perhaps triggered during the discussion. In 13 interviews, there were 38 instances of parts where the interviewee discussed something that brought back some negative feelings. For example, some of Kala’s negative feelings involved discontent with her career where happiness seemed in fostering and then the difficulties encountered in the first year after her decision to foster, and the questioning of whether she had taken the right decision. She also commented on being “really hurt by her [a friend’s] opinion” concerning fostering. Other feelings revolved around what women who have lost their mothers and are not mothers themselves can feel on Mother’s Day. Sarah too had some recollections of her ailing mother before she passed away and she expressed how difficult it was.

Personal Reflection

According to Gemignani (2011), counter-transference is what happens when some of the emotions felt by the participant seem to transfer to the interviewer.

One instance of this felt counter-transference was during interviewing Nancy (Christian Irish, 63). Nancy has worked with the elderly and was commenting on the verse ‘Honor your father and your mother’, and she said, “There is, there is a very common phrase: ‘I don’t want to be a burden to my children.’”

This phrase triggered some emotions in me because it resonated with what some elderly members of my family sometimes say. Although it might not be expected of researchers to change based on an interview with their research participants, I personally feel that this commonality of the phrase (as expressed by Nancy) allowed me to think differently of this phrase. While reading on counter-transference, and even before the data analysis stage, this theme rang a bell and I was reminded of this exchange. I dug out the video and found the script. Counter-transference will probably be one recurring theme in my research.

Another example is Feysal's (Muslim British, 30) comment on Evangelical Christians that caricatured them in a way new to me. He maintained that they took for granted the fact that they are 'born again' and that they didn't need to work hard on their sins, while Catholic teachings make more sense as Catholics are usually aware of their sins and their being undeserving of mercy. I personally felt I wanted to 'correct' what seemed to me to be a misconception: a strawman painting some Christians in what to me was the wrong image. The fact that I felt the comment was personal gave me an indication that the interaction in that part of the interview was genuine enough to trigger in me some real feelings. I'm glad I didn't defend the Christian viewpoint then. The focus was after all on the interviewee and not about me.

4.2.1.8 Interviewee says they don't understand the verse

There were some parts in some of the interviews where the interviewee expressed their lack of understanding of what the verse meant. Fifteen out of the 28 interviewees had some instances where they said they did not understand the verse (a total of 22 instances). Liz, for example, asked, "a little lower than the angels? I've never really understood that verse if I'm absolutely honest." And then she continued asking me, the interviewer, "What do you understand by it?"

Not understanding the verse did not stop the discussion about what it could mean within the general domain of Christianity. It also, as seen in the role reversal example, allowed the interviewee to be empowered enough to ask the interviewer for his understanding, which is a natural feature in two-way conversations (but perhaps not in job interviews, interrogations, or one-sided high-power-distance discussions). Omar said, "Erm. I don't know what that

means: ‘And indeed We have honoured the Children of Adam’”. Adel expressed his lack of understanding of expressions such as glory and honour (in part of the verse that says ‘and crowned him with glory and honour’) saying that he does not know how to explain such concepts when he sees them (in sacred texts), but he continued explaining that he understands that humans have some moments where they emit some special “beauty” rather than honour or glory.

Hassan commented on ‘… And man bore it; he was indeed unjust and ignorant’ saying, “I don’t understand it well. I myself don’t understand well; you know? But you could say that ‘unjust and ignorant’ could mean that he doesn’t know what could happen or the extent of the power of this stewardship? It could be so, but I don’t understand it well.”

Not understanding the exact meaning of a verse, as seen in the previous example, did not hinder Hassan from attempting to figure out what it could mean within the context of his general understanding of the Quran. He, then, carried on thinking aloud about the verse and reached the conclusion that it is ‘unjust’ that he did not understand; he understood ‘ignorant’ (as he explained in the quote given above). He said, “It’s, erm, ‘unjust’, I don’t understand it. ‘Ignorant’ could refer to the ignorance of the extent of the responsibility that would be on his shoulders.”

This example shows some clear evidence to the process of thinking of what something could mean, and in the process, some fine-tuning of the extent of the lack of understanding. As seen in the example above, this thinking process led Hassan to know that he probably understood the part of ‘ignorant’, but that he still experienced some ambiguity concerning the expression ‘unjust’.

Looking at the verse ‘Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me’, Boules said, “No, I don’t understand this verse. I mean, I don’t know how. Erm. I don’t understand the concept of ‘why more’. Why the comparison to start with? I don’t understand.” Being asked to imagine what it could mean, he went on to talk about priorities,

but he still made it clear that ranking was difficult to comprehend since God is in all (in loving parents, friends, and all).

These instances of interviewees expressing not understanding certain parts of verses did not bring the discussion to a halt; it, however, led the discussion to 'what it could mean' which in turn seemed to trigger thinking of the answer on the spot. It also shows the genuine interaction where the interviewees did not opt for any answers that they could think of. It also reflects the comfort they experienced in that they did not have to help the researcher with an answer; they, instead, preferred to engage in a natural dialogue where they may not be aware of all the meaning in their sacred texts. On the other hand, the sacredness of the text may have prevented them from coming up with 'just anything' that could be remotely or directly relevant. Being in a divine domain, interviewees seemed honest enough to express what they understood and what they did not.

4.2.1.9 Appropriateness of discussing sacred texts in social research

In one paragraph from his post-interview email commenting on his experience, Mostapha said,

> 'The interview was also intellectually intriguing; I felt I was mentally active and was thinking during our discussion. This was interesting, and let me tell you it was also entertaining. Perhaps this is why I can remember it because I enjoyed it. I had thought it was going to be in a question/answer format – an expectation that turned out to be wrong, because it was an exciting dialogue. Even when you asked or enquired, I received that as expressing your interest in understanding and knowing, and that made me engage more in the dialogue.'

Commenting on discussing Quranic verses, Hind said, "and the good thing here is that it's something sacred, but you have the right to interpret, or, how can I say that, to discuss. And this is what's missing in today's mentalities, [doing an impression of someone else giving stern comments:] 'no, this is something and that's it, this is not open for discussion', and this is a problem we have now."

While most Christian interviewees seemed to have engaged in a real-life discussion (like that of a “chat in the pub” (Liz) or one with “a fellow Christian in my Bible study group” (Robert)), Hind expressed her enjoyment of having engaged in a discussion where she freely voiced her personal faith, even when she does not usually engage in similar discussions with other people. She said, “It’s good to, to talk about such stuff, to be honest. I mean, I don’t talk about such stuff with, with people, as I said. But, I mean, it’s good to express yourself, or express what you think about some of the verses, I mean. It’s good.”

Personal Reflection

Perhaps it is a good thing that Hind felt that she enjoyed talking about ‘such stuff’ while she does not usually do so with other people. I had thought that engaging in discussing religious teachings and texts would be familiar and natural to my participants, and that this very point would make it favourable to them. It turns out, however, that it could also be liberating to engage in a discussion that they would not otherwise engage in.

It can also be argued that discussing personal opinions about sacred texts can feel more secure in the research setting where Hind was able to trust the generally ethical research approach expected in a PhD study.

In her post-interview email, Margaret wrote,

> ‘…In general I didn't feel uncomfortable about discussing texts from the bible, that could be because I generally wouldn't describe myself as 'strictly' religious and I am open to different interpretations and beliefs regarding religion. I guess it's possible that some might not feel comfortable talking about different interpretations or even using sacred texts in this way. On the other hand, I guess those that would feel this way probably wouldn't participate in the first place….’

4.2.2 Owned by the interviewee – Did the interviewee show signs of ownership?

4.2.2.1 Feeling worried that they may be unfamiliar with (some of) the verses.

Some participants (for example, Margaret, Omar, Mirium and Nancy) expressed that they had been slightly worried or conscious (before the interview) that they might not be aware of all verses or competent enough to answer questions about the Bible/Quran. Nancy, for example, said that she was slightly worried she might be asked to comment on something from the Old Testament that she may not be totally familiar with. When asked about her expectations before the interview, Mirium expressed that she was worried, saying, "to be honest, I thought: 'Oh, God! If Maged gets me to quote something from the Quran and I don't really know it too well [unintelligible]', Oh, I would be a bit nervous."

During the interview itself, Yasmine was not aware of what the term 'dutiful' meant [in a verse about being dutiful to one's parents], and when asked at the end of the interview about any final comments, she answered as follows:

> "**Interviewer:** OK! Do you have any other final comments on this interview?
>
> **Yasmine:** Erm, Not really! Apart from this [pointing to the verse] when I was like 'Oh, I don't know what 'dutiful' means', and I thought like maybe you were probably like 'how does she not know what it means?!'"

There is this expectation of a context! It could be argued that such a worry may not feature if participants are invited to an interview to answer some questions about their opinion on something general. Having no context will not then be an issue, because one can simply say, I have no idea! There is this idea that one must have got something to say about his or her holy book. That could cause some unnecessary worry (and it needs to be handled well in the information sheet and during the interview). It may also point out the need for some special qualities not only in the texts chosen but also the interviewer him- or herself.

However, it also shows the intuitive assumption that a context must exist (whether this context is rich, full of reasons, easily accessible or not, etc.).

Teresa captured such a dilemma in the following quotes: “I think I was a little bit nervous because there is a lot still about my own path into religion that I don’t know. Like a lot of these [verses] I haven’t read before. I don’t know the Bible or a lot of things off by heart, or anything like that. I cannot sort of extract them from my mind and say them.” She carried on commenting that although there were some verses she was not familiar with, she still knew “how she felt about them.” She was then asked whether the expectation to know the verses was warranted; she answered: “Yeah, I think people, I think, to a certain extent, there is an expectation that you, if you read something whether you know the quote or not, that you know what it’s talking about.”

Personal Reflection

Perhaps this could explain why one potential candidate (a Muslim Egyptian) was hesitant to take part in the interview, and he requested the verses be sent to him before the interview. Reflecting back on this, I felt that his hesitation required me (from an ethical point of view) to release him from taking part in my research since it seemed to me that his ‘full’ consent was not obtained.

However, reflecting on some of the participants’ concerns regarding their familiarity with the verses used, I can now understand to a certain extent his reservations in taking part in a religious discussion to which he might not be well-prepared if he faces unfamiliar texts during the interview.

One way to handle this (in future research) could be to give the potential participants the choice of some texts to discuss, and they can select their favourite ones, among many. Another suggestion can be to ask participants to bring to the interview their favourite verses; however, this will require more commitment on the side of the interviewee, and it will also make it more challenging in comparing themes and topics in the data gathered across different interviews.

4.2.2.2 Interviewee does not seem to accept the verse or disagrees with it

Some participants expressed their disagreements with some verses, and some showed some reservations about a few elements in the verses discussed. In ten interviews, there were 19 instances of such disagreement.

Hind in commenting on the verse that says, 'You will not find any people who believe in Allah and the Last Day, making friendship with those who oppose Allah and His Messenger, even though they were their fathers, or their sons, or their brothers, or their kindred.', she said, "Erm… No… me? Personally? No, I mean, I mean, no objection to the, to the verse. But [a 2-second pause] not like that I, [a 3-second pause], what shall I say, [a 4-second pause], I mean, as I said, it could be that someone who is not religious, and yes, of course, I can make friends with him, I mean, he could be my brother. And he could be [a 2-second pause], so, I mean, it's not, even if he or she does not believe in God, I mean, [shrugging her shoulders], it is not about me. Once again, it's, I mean, in the afterlife. But I become good to everyone. He doesn't have to be religious, or a believer or not a believer."

While Hind disagrees with the thrust of the verse (that may seem to suggest, at first glance, that believers are not expected to make friends with non-believers), she still draws upon a religious teaching to support her disagreement with the literal message in the verse (namely, that there is an afterlife where only then people will be judged). This disagreement, however, followed a caveat that stated clearly that there is "no objection" to the verse.

Yasmine, while thinking aloud about what the same verse (referred to above) could mean, asked the interviewer whether it meant "making friends with a different religion?" She went on to say that if that is what the verse meant then: "I disagree with that, because at the end of the day we are all human." Mirium said, "I would find this really hard to do" after she thought for a while about what the verse could mean. She went on to explain that she has a lot of non-believing friends and that it should not be a problem.

Disagreeing with verses was not limited to the verse discussed above, but some Christian participants found the verse “Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me” to be disagreeable. Margaret referred to her discomfort with the notion of comparison, and so did Boules. Teresa thought that everyone (including Jesus who said that verse) should be happy with whatever amount of love given, and it does not necessarily have to be more than anyone else.

Personal Reflection

Before embarking on the empirical study, I had not expected at all that some participants were going to disagree with some verses. I had thought that subscription to the sacred text should require assenting to every verse and perhaps possibly disagreeing with the literal interpretation.

It seems to me that one feature of ‘ownership’ is perhaps the ability to critique (and sometimes disagree with) what one holds dear. I, a Christian, may not find the courage or the licence to criticise somebody else’s religious text as it would then seem to be biased or unfair.

Part of the struggle in disagreeing with part of one’s sacred text can be seen in the number and duration of pauses that some of the quotes show, where participants seem to be trying to marry the general thrust of the religious belief with what seems to be a contrasting teaching.

From a methodological viewpoint, this dilemma did not seem to halt the conversation. It, on the contrary, led to perhaps more (deeper) thinking on the side of the interviewee who brought in some of their personal lives (for example, in having friends with non-believers) and at the same time subscribing to the holy book from which the text is taken. In their elaboration on their reasons for the discomfort or the objection, they articulated how they thought about the issue in question (for example, disagreeing with the concept of comparison or the need for more love.)

4.2.2.3 Interviewee guesses the answer

There were eight instances (in six interviews) where participants articulated that what they were about to share was their understanding or guessing that may not be "theologically grounded" to quote Feysal's words. In the context of discussing being dutiful to one's parents when this may clash with one's wife's wishes (for example, in cases of a decision to move away from one's parent's home), he said about advising a friend of his, "My response [to my friend] was, and again I'm not sure how theologically appropriate this is, but my response to him was that his parents have rights over him, but his wife has rights as well." He went on to say, "I hope that he didn't, he didn't think I was making a theological statement anyway, but in my mind it seems to be quite clear that your parents, what your parents want is very important, but if your wife is undergoing hardship or difficulty, then your priority should be resolving that."

Another participant (Boules) asked whether he could guess the answer before giving his opinion in what seemed to be a warning that his opinion might not be 'right' or might not be the 'proper' theological understanding. Youssef (Christian Egyptian, 34) did so too when he attempted to figure out what Christ meant by loving one's parents more than him. He used some Maybe's while trying to think what could be the possibilities that led Jesus to instruct people to love him more than they loved their parents.

It can be drawn from the previous examples that when participants did not have a clear understanding of some of the verses, they were genuinely honest about communicating to what extent what they said was their personal opinions or guesses. From an ownership lens, it seems that one needs to add such a warning before giving an opinion in case others perceive his or her opinion to be the 'official' religious stance on the issue. Perhaps this is in a way similar to members of a political party who would be clear in interviews about which hat they wear in their answers to certain questions: the official political party hat or their personal one.

It also seems that the same 'licence' to critique one's sacred text (observed in the previous section) can extend to include guessing what some ambiguous parts of the sacred texts could mean. Here the rich and wide domain of spirituality from which participants can draw their ideas and opinions can justify such a licence. In a way, even if an interviewee does not know exactly what one verse means, he or she has other tools to use to (attempt to) figure out what it could mean within the general understanding of his or her faith.

4.2.2.4 Interviewee educates the interviewer

Thirteen interviews featured 26 instances where the interviewee seemed to give some information to educate the interviewer. The information was usually to do with what Abell and Myers (2008) call a 'gap' on the side of the interviewer.

Liz, for example, set out to explain the plot of a book she was reading at the time after establishing that the interviewer was not familiar with the book. She had said, "*The Hundred Foot Journey*, are you familiar with it?" When the interviewer said, "No", she went on to say, "Basically, it's a story of an Indian family …" and explained the main plot of the story. Nancy (Irish) gave the interviewer a mini-language-lesson on the phrase that means 'hello' in Irish and its literal meaning of "God and His mother Mary be with you". Talia (Rwandan) explained how asking for help is perceived in some African cultures, especially when an older man asks a lady for help.

In some discussions, the interviewee seemed to explain to the interviewer something concerning the former's religious belief (in such a way that may not feature in a conversation taking place between two followers of the same faith). For example, Hassan explained the differences between Sadaqat and Zakat in Islam (since the interviewer seemed to use the terms interchangeably). He also explained how one should calculate the amount required to be given to charity. The first Shi'a interviewee (Hussein) was commenting on the same verse on Sadaqat but had to explain to the interviewer that Shi'as handle charity giving (Zakat in Sunni Islam) differently and that it is called 'Khoms' which literally translates from Arabic: one

fifth. Also when Mostapha was telling a story, he stopped midway through to explain who 'Omar Ebn el-Khattab' was. In his basic explanation, he did not seem to expect the interviewer to know who Omar Ebn el-Khattab was (a prominent figure in the early Islamic time).

Personal Reflection

I can see myself using similar language if I was to tell a story involving Jesus and John, for example. I would introduce who John was (but not perhaps who Jesus was). Mostapha in the example above did not introduce the Prophet or what could be assumed to be 'general knowledge' that an Egyptian Christian would know about Islam. He, however, educated me on who Omar Ebn el-Khattab was in order for the story to flow well from that point on so that the point he was trying to make could be smoothly understood.

In one part of the interview, Hassan explained that questions like the ones asked during the interview were asked of the Prophet. Such a comment can indicate that Hassan saw the discussion as a naturally occurring (rather than artificial) one. It also shows that, although he did not mean to compare himself to the Prophet, he was perhaps referring to a discussion where one expert is asked a genuine question from a less-informed someone who is interested to know.

It is worth noting here that the instances where the interviewee educated the interviewer were instances where some gauging was carried out to assess the amount and extent of knowledge that the interviewer had in that context. This can be seen in Liz's question about the interviewer's familiarity with the book she was talking about, Nancy's assumption that the interviewer did not speak Irish, or the subtler interaction between Hassan and the interviewer. In the latter, Hassan did use some references without introducing them, such as: "The intention, it's the intention, then. The intention plays a role here, for sure. Your intention makes all the difference. 'The reward of deeds depends upon the intentions.'"

The Hadith (a Prophet's saying) from which the last quote is taken is famous, and it could be presumed that Hassan expected the interviewer to be familiar with it (which was the case). On the other hand, when the interviewer asked how Hassan would guarantee that his Zakat would go to the poor and not to the renovation of the mosque, for example, it was clear to Hassan that the interviewer did not know the differences between Zakat and Sadaqat. That was when he explained the differences at length. The same was noticed in Sarah's gauging of whether the interviewer was familiar with a book called *The Shack* and another called *A Grief Observed*. She explained at length only the one with which the interviewer was not familiar.

Aya compared the culture of her Arab country with that of Egypt (the interviewer's birth place), and one more time, it was clear that she was aware of what the interviewer would know and what he would not, and based on that was the amount and nature of her illuminating him, filling his knowledge gap. However, in another instance, she needed to check whether the researcher was familiar with an Islamic theme as follows:

> "**Aya:** We have something called 'Estikhara' [Guidance Seeking Prayer], and I don't know if you've heard of it or not.
>
> **Interviewer:** Tell me more.
>
> **Aya:** In some sects it is practised more, and it has many ways, but the general thrust is, I don't know if this is relevant to your research, but the idea is if you have a dilemma, or not a dilemma, if you have an important decision to make, be it marriage, trade, or anything […]"

That simple comment of "and I don't know if you've heard of it or not" allowed Aya to establish whether she should elaborate and explain, which she did based on the researcher's response of "tell me more".

While the 'information gap' can be seen more in the case of interviewing someone from a different faith background, there was a range of issues (as seen in the examples quoted

above) that triggered some extended explanation from the interviewee who held the floor to explain at length their points (be it a book plot, a language tip or a cultural expectation).

4.3 The who – Findings linked to the conversation partners

In this section, the findings are seen from three angles; who the interviewee is, who the interviewer is, and the interactional identities of both in the interview setting.

4.3.1 Who the interviewee is

It is understandable that every interviewee comes to the interview setting with a baggage of background including their age, culture, personal preferences, gender, etc. The following two points are to do with who the interviewee is as far as the sacred texts are concerned. The two points are: what the holy book represents to the participant, and how familiar he or she is with the holy book and/or the verses used.

4.3.1.1 The position of the sacred book in one's life

Interviewees described the way each of them sees the sacred book they subscribe to (the Bible or the Quran) in different ways. For example, Liz, in an answer to what the position of the Bible in her life is, said, "It's, it's at the centre. Even though, I have to be honest, I don't read it every day. My days tend to go better if I do, but I don't. Erm. But it is still the, the, the, core of what my life is built on. Well, Jesus is the core of what my life is built on. And, and stories which are recorded in the Bible are, yeah, they form a foundation. When I'm low, it encourages me. When I need a bigger picture on life, it gives me a bigger picture. It just reminds me of things to be thankful for, I suppose. […] So basically Jesus and the instruction in the Bible form a foundation."

Margaret said, "In the Greek church, the way it works is the priest kind of chants the verses from the Bible, and we don't often have the written form when we're in the church. So we don't normally see people with the Bible. I don't really read the Bible; it's more like I listen to it. I've read extracts from the Bible when I've been to a Greek school, for example, but it's more traditional to be listening to the priest chanting the verses rather than reading."

Adel confirmed that he read the Bible, with some parts that he reads “repeatedly”. He mentioned in particular “James”, “Proverbs”, and “the four gospels” more than other parts. Nancy mentioned 1984 as the year she started reading the Bible (in her thirties) and going to a Bible study group, and she carried on saying, “I read it now every day. I have a Bible reading every morning. I have it on my iPad now.”

In his answer to a question on whether he subscribes to the whole Bible, Robert said that he does. He added that certain parts of the Bible are more difficult than others, but the whole Bible needs to be read as one unit and that separate sections or verses should not be read in isolation.

Hassan said that although he has not memorised the Quran by heart, he feels that he understands it better than many people who have memorised the whole book. For Boules, he said that he still finds some parts of the Bible, especially the Old Testament, difficult to understand, where some stories involve narratives of violence. He said that he does not usually go into depth in these passages and that he usually “puts them aside” when he reads the Bible.

In talking about the position of the sacred book in one’s life, it can be noticed that whether the interviewees read the Bible/Quran regularly or not, there are no issues around the lack of accessibility. Difficulties in understanding some parts or in being dedicated enough to read the holy book on a regular basis may intuitively point to the expectation that one should, or may be expected to, at least try and understand what God/Allah has said in His holy book. There was this general notion of the impossibility to reach a state where one understands fully everything or where one can confidently say that he or she is blameless and fully committed.

The range of the possibilities of the position of the sacred book in one’s life may shed some light on perhaps the nature of dedication one gives to the book. While subscription to the book as holy and the familiarity of its content are not interchangeable terms, there could be

some overlap between the two. It is, however, clear in the data that the more committed one says they are to the holy book, the more they had to say during the interview.

4.3.1.2 The familiarity of the interviewee with the verse(s)

Commenting on the selection of the verses used in the research, Nancy expressed her comfort that she was familiar with the six verses and that she was not seeing them for the first time during the interview setting; she had been exposed to the verses "in the past 30 years." She said, "…these are all ones that I've read before, and thought about before, so they are internalised."

Some participants were familiar with the verses and could recite them by heart. In one example, Mohammad, who was interviewed via Skype, was unable to see the laminated verses on his computer screen so he asked the interviewer to read the beginning of the verses aloud. It was clear that he was so familiar with the literal phrasing of the verses that he completed each, once the interviewer read the first part. Some interviewees were also familiar with the context, chapter or section where the verse features. For example, some referred to the fact that some verses were taken from the Sermon on the Mount (Liz and Nancy) or the Old Testament (Kala). Sarah even quoted the original Hebrew meaning of one term that describes God's provision.

4.3.2 Who the interviewer is

It is challenging to know which part of the interviewer's identity is being seen in the interview process: is it the nationality, gender, religious beliefs, experiences, researcher status? Or is it a mixture of two or more? And possibly the mixture is more than simply the sum of two or more components.

All participants were asked at the end of the interview about whether they would have agreed to take part in the interview if the interviewer was of a different gender, faith (or no faith) or nationality. It is understandable that their answers may be hypothetical in that they were answering to a what-if situation (and their real decision and/or interaction during an

interview setting may differ). Some participants (such as Robert, Rosaline and Sarah) expressed this very point (that they were not sure how in a real situation their reaction would be). However, in their answers to such a question, some participants shared some insights of how they felt during the interview and perhaps what role the interviewer's identities may have played.

4.3.2.1 The interviewer's nationality and gender

In principle, all participants said they had no problem being interviewed by someone from any nationality, and that their answers would be the same (apart from some practical considerations). For example, Sarah said that the only thing she would then need to change was the language she used in the interview (she would use English instead of a mixture of Arabic and English). Shenouda (Christian Egyptian, 22) said that he had no problem with interviewers from all backgrounds "unless the interview is conducted in a language other than Arabic."

The same stance seemed to be the case with the interviewer's gender. No participants expressed a preference to either being interviewed by someone of a specific gender or to being interviewed by someone of the same/opposite sex. However, Mirium (who is interested in gender studies as part of her academic career) said that the dynamics might have been different with a female interviewer where perhaps more gender issues would be discussed.

4.3.2.2 The interviewer's faith in relation to that of the interviewee

The more interesting element was about the interviewer's faith. While the main thrust of the question given to the interviewee at the end of the interview was about the faith of the interviewer, their answers revolved around the faith of the interviewer in relation to that of the interviewee and were never discussed in absolute terms (such as Christian interviewers or Muslim interviewers). The hypothetical question was answered with an interview setting in mind where two people engage in a discussion and how smooth or comfortable that

discussion would go with people sharing the same faith or coming from two different backgrounds.

There was a range of opinions regarding whether the participants would agree to be interviewed by someone of faith different to that of the interviewer in this study (Christian). Participants who had no problem in being interviewed by someone else were asked whether their answers would be different or would be phrased differently and whether they think that their level of comfort and ease during the interview would differ. Following are some of the opinions starting first with participants sharing with the interviewer the same Christian faith.

For Christian participants (sharing with the interviewer the same faith)

Interviewing participants from the same faith background made it easy to ask such a question (would you agree to be interviewed by someone of a different or no faith). Some participants maintained that it would be difficult to engage in a similar discussion with a Muslim interviewer. Sarah, for example, expressed that she may have some "reservation in sharing the intimate stuff in the relationship with God". Kala, when asked the same question, said, "I think I might have difficulty in expressing these views if you are a Muslim person, not necessarily because you are a man or your gender, but because of what you believe, maybe because they don't understand the background. I guess they won't ask me those questions from the Bible. I don't know. So, I would probably word it differently because they might not necessarily understand the Christian sort of background. I don't know; they might do, if they have the same sort of faith in God, kind of thing, sussed out more than we do."

There was also an opinion that there could be a possibility of being willing to share one's faith with a Muslim (Sarah and Nancy), or that the answers would be presented without a lot of 'I don't knows' (Sarah). Sarah was of the view that she was more at ease with a Christian interviewer who understands the background and would appreciate some of the uncertainties that may come across in some of her answers. Kala felt at ease too and said that she was not hesitant to share what she thought the verses meant. Robert was of a

similar opinion and he said that the fact that he was told that the interviewer was a Christian "would make me more open to actually explaining things in a way that I would to a fellow Christian in my Bible study group." Robert, however, did not exclude the possibility of accepting being interviewed by a non-Christian, if he was directly asked to share his faith. He would not, in that case, be "very specific" as he was; he would give more general answers. Nancy said that she would feel "more challenged" if she was to be interviewed by an atheist because "this could be my one opportunity to let them know that God loves them." She maintained that it would be less challenging to be interviewed by a Muslim (than being interviewed by an atheist) as she knows that Muslims have a faith and a real desire to know and understand God. She, like Robert, did not rule out her agreement to be interviewed by a non-Christian, but she said she would "feel less comfortable."

Personal Reflection

From this research perspective, I am glad that in those comments, my participants suggest that they did feel comfortable in their dialogue with me, comfortable enough to share their "intimate stuff in the relationship with God" as Sarah put it. Likening the conversation to that with a "fellow Christian in my Bible study group" (Robert) or "a chat in the pub" (Liz) points out the genuine and relaxed nature that at least those participants felt during the interviews.

On the other hand, some participants believed that they would generally welcome an interview with a non-Christian (such as Shenouda, and Talia). Talia maintained that an interview with a non-Christian interviewer will be "a good platform to know what they believe in as well," and she believed she would answer exactly as she did and that she would not change anything in the "personal opinions" she gave regardless of the faith of the interviewer. However, when asked about the possible unfamiliarity of a non-Christian with her references to some Biblical themes (for example, in her reference to 'the Corinthians'), she said, "in this context, I assumed you know what I was talking about."

Medhat was of the view that he would agree to be interviewed by anyone, but his style would be different by nature, adding that if it was someone he did not know, then the way his answers would be phrased may be different. Youssef said that if he had been asked the question by a non-Christian interviewer he would give “answers very close” to what he said; however, he would revisit some of his terminology. He continued to say that because he knew the interviewer personally, he was aware of the interviewer’s ability to comprehend the themes and terminology that he used. Boules was of a similar opinion saying that he would use totally different language. He maintained that if he was to be interviewed by an atheist, his focus would be on humanity rather than anything else. Having said that, Boules added, “the interview was comfortable with you, but it wouldn’t have been comfortable with a Muslim interviewer.” It is worth noting here that for Egyptians, only two religions are acknowledged in Egypt: Islam and Christianity; therefore, when some Egyptian participants refer to a Muslim interviewer, they may also mean any non-Christian rather than Muslim interviewers in particular.

Liz also maintained that she “would respond differently” to a non-Christian interviewer as he or she would not be speaking the same language that she and the interviewer shared (that of the Christian faith). She continued to think aloud how differently she would answer, and she said, “It would have been probably slightly different. I can’t say exactly how, or maybe I, I might perhaps have been more defensive possibly, […] It will depend very much on the interviewer and their attitude.”

Shenouda believed he would give the same answers without any special preparation before the interview. Teresa thought that it would not matter as long as the difference in faith “doesn’t affect your [the interviewer’s] line of questioning.” She maintained that it would be a problem if the interviewer criticised the interviewee’s ideas due to their own beliefs.

Rosaline was not sure and maintained that “it depends.” She believed that it was all to do with how reliable the interviewer is so that she, as interviewee, can be confident and open in

her answers based on that. She said that she would want to know about the interviewer before the interview session, “because if he or she wants to know my personal testimonies, of course I would want to know more about him or her.” Nardine was of the opinion that it is all about whether she knows the interviewer or not (regardless of their faith) and Kala thought she might feel more “suspicious” about the motives of an atheist doing such a piece of research.

For Muslim participants (of a faith different to that of the interviewer’s)

Muslim participants were also asked whether they would have agreed to be interviewed by someone from a faith different to that of the interviewer’s (i.e. a non-Christian interviewer) and whether they might have felt more/less (or as) comfortable.

Hassan and Maryam did not mind what faith the interviewer held or what gender they were. Each said, though, that it all depends on the “character of the interviewee” (Hassan) and their personal preferences (Maryam) and by whom they may feel more comfortable being interviewed. In both cases, they were of the opinion that their answers would not be different in any circumstances.

Mostapha maintained that being interviewed by a woman or by a Muslim would not have made any difference. He also said that it did not cross his mind during the interview that the interviewer was of a different faith. He, then, added that having known the interviewer from before got the interview to a comfortable start. Mostapha said that with atheist interviewers, he would have “entered a totally different area” from the premise that an atheist interviewer would not believe in the existence of a god, but a Christian interviewer does. For him the “common ground” that was enough to start and sustain the discussion was the fact that the interviewer believes in the existence of God.

Personal Reflection

It is interesting to see what areas of my identity are foregrounded and what areas are in the background. Coming from a faith background different to that of the interviewee does not necessarily mean that that difference would be the most obvious side of my identity. This matches what Nardine too said, that to her, the most important factor is whether she knew the researcher. Perhaps to me, potential participants were either Christians or Muslims, and each participant's faith was the main criterion in my selection, and perhaps that is why my interviewee's faith was the main foregrounded part of their identity. But to each of them, I might have been perceived as someone they know, a colleague, a PhD researcher, an acquaintance from the University, etc.

Hind was of the opinion that a Muslim interviewer may be in a position to criticise her opinions especially if he or she had some mastery of the religious teachings. She felt that she may be on the receiving end of criticism if a Muslim interviewer knows more than she does and uses that more knowledge to tell her that she is wrong about some of her interpretation or opinions. Yasmine had a similar feeling that a Muslim interviewer may disagree with her ways of expressing certain thoughts such as being dutiful to her dad, and she expressed that although Islamic teachings are clear in this regard that she should be dutiful to her dad, "it hurts" to be in the dilemma she had explained in an earlier part in the interview. She was of the opinion that a Muslim interviewer may not understand the hurt and would possibly disagree with what can seem to be her lack of willingness to follow the commandment in the verse. Nabila said, "the fact that you are Christian means that we don't get into a fight about Islam," and she continued to explain that different sects of the same religion may argue about things differently. Feysal alluded to a similar thought when he maintained that if he was to be interviewed by a Muslim, he may not always know "what kind of Muslim" the interviewer is (Sufi, Salafi, etc.) or what the interviewer's positions are. He said that "another Muslim [interviewer] may have made it fairly, not difficult, but it would have changed how I approached it, emotionally, not intellectually, but emotionally."

He also added that it may be embarrassing if he was interviewed by a Muslim who knew every single reference discussed in the dialogue while as interviewee he did not. He referred to the expected gap of knowledge on the side of a Christian interviewer that may make the interview dynamics less stressful (or less demanding). He said, “The reality is that I don’t remember [all the details of the accounts], so you have to say you don’t remember, but it’s the response of the other person. […] Even if you [the interviewer] knew every single one of them, the fact is that it is remarkable for you, for a Coptic Christian, to know, whereas if a Muslim knew every one of the accounts, they will look upon me as in I am remarkable for not knowing. That’s the worry when you’re speaking to another Muslim is if they know these things and you don’t, you feel in a position that you should know them or that you feel embarrassed. And again it is not an intellectual position, but we’re not intellectual beings, we have an emotional response to these things.”

Raheel (Muslim Pakistani, 26) said, “I would struggle to get things across” if he was to be interviewed by someone who is “extremely religious.” Aya pointed out one interesting reason why it would not be easier being interviewed by a Muslim interviewer (someone who shares the same faith with her):

> “**Interviewer:** Would the interview be easier if the researcher was Muslim?
>
> **Aya:** No, I would be sensing what his viewpoints about those verses are. What are his impressions? I would ask him at the beginning, to know how he’s positioning the whole thing in his head. Accordingly, I know what limits I have to speak about the thoughts I have in my mind.
>
> **Interviewer:** Are you saying that as Christian, I may not have the licence to have an opinion about verses from the Quran?
>
> **Aya:** Even if you have an opinion about it, it won’t be very personal. But if you are Muslim, definitely you are practising certain things, so, for example, I may criticise a behaviour that you do. […] I would be cautious. I would listen to his opinion.”

Mirium raised a very interesting point regarding the faith of the interviewer in relation to that of the interviewee. She explained that, for example, if a female researcher who wears the

hijab interviews Muslim women as part of her research, one could wonder how she would be perceived around interviewees who do not wear the hijab. They may try to be "more religious" around her. She reflected on the same issue imagining what if it was "a Muslim man with a big beard" interviewing her. She said, "Maybe I would think 'Oh! Do I need to say more religious things?' Or, you know, 'Are you expecting me to say certain things?'"

This shows the sensitivity of the interviewer's perceived degree of faith and not only simply what religion they follow. Issues such as the familiarity with the texts (alluded to by Feysal), the degree of flexibility with interpretations other than the interviewer's (Hind and Aya) and the apparent commitment to some religious practices (such as wearing the hijab or growing a beard, as alluded to by Mirium) can all influence the perception of the degree of religiosity. It also shows that it is the perceived commitment to one's faith in relation to the interviewee's and not simply in absolute either/or terms.

Personal Reflection

Before starting the empirical part of this study, my expectations were that my Christian participants were undoubtedly going to feel relaxed and comfortable and that my Muslim participants may feel less so. It seems that the data in this empirical research suggest that the attitude rather than the faith of the interviewer is a contributor to the dynamics of a relaxing interview setting.

4.3.2.3 The interviewer's attitude (and the importance of showing interest)

One clear recurring notion was the importance of the interviewer's attitude during the interview setting. As seen from the different opinions regarding whether the participants in this research would accept an interview invitation from someone from a different (or no) faith (presented in some detail in section 4.3.2.2 above), it seems to boil down to the attitude rather than the religious beliefs of the interviewer or whether they are shared by the interviewee.

This attitude was phrased in different terms including the researcher being “friendly” (Sarah, Hind and Nabila) allowing the interviewee to “put forward” her personal opinions without thinking too much before saying them (Nabila), or that the interviewer had good interview manners (Mirium). Here is what Mirium said, “As an interviewer, you were very, very good. Yeah, like, I think it’s such a hard thing to do. Because, especially for your research, You’re, you’re letting the interviewee do all the prompts. But, you know, it’s so hard, even like nodding, or you might think ‘Oh, I will say more of that’ You’re very, in control, very, you know, you chipped in when you needed to. But you still, you didn’t do any of the guiding at all. […] You had a really good interview manner, really, really good. Honestly, I think as a method, so suited to your own skills and your own abilities. You have interviewers who just, you know, don’t like talking to people, and they are using this method, but it’s not suited to who they are as a person, and that can be really, really difficult, but I think it’s really suited to your, you as a person. You put people at ease. I think I just felt really calm. I normally get a bit nervous: ‘Oh, what are they gonna say’!”

The references to the researcher’s own skills seem to emphasise the importance of the ability to provide a safe atmosphere for participants to share what they think. This is similar to what Sarah said about the researcher’s having “the gift to make people comfortable.” Sarah maintained that she may turn down an invitation to take part in a research interview if she knows that the interviewer is someone who would criticise and make fun of her faith, saying, “I don’t want to be used in a way against my own values and beliefs.” She said that she felt “safe enough” to share what may be used at face value to show ‘contradictions’ in the Bible, but she trusted that the author would understand what she meant in the context where it was said and that he would present it ethically. Rosaline said that she would ask why the interviewer was doing that type of research and that she would agree to being interviewed if the interviewer wanted “information,” but if he or she wanted ‘to contradict’ [what she says], then she would not agree. She said she would also be “keen on how [her] answers are being portrayed.”

Teresa believed that there are a lot of “crossovers” among religions and this can easily lead to a “good discussion” even if the interviewer and interviewee do not share the same religion. Aya spoke about the interviewer’s “level of maturity” and the extent to which he or she would accept personal opinions from the interviewees. She spoke of the need of an accepting attitude and some “tolerance” so she could discuss the same topics she discussed in this research. While she does not disagree to be interviewed by anyone based on their identity (including gender, faith, and nationality), she said, “I don’t have a problem with the researcher, but I would be a little cautious in the things I would say, because it also depends on how silly or nice the researcher is, whether he opens up things, [or] closes down topics.”

Raheel said that knowing the interviewer from before helped him talk freely, and he feared that if he was to be interviewed by “a very Islamic person or a very Christian person,” that he may be seen by that person (after finishing the interview) as “someone who is non-Islamic, or someone who is useless” and that he would be “blacklisted.”

Hussein (Shi’a Muslim), when asked about whether he would agree to be interviewed by someone of different identities to the interviewer, he said:

> “**Hussein:** If he has reacted like you, then I don’t have any problems being interviewed with anyone.
>
> **Interviewer:** Can you elaborate a little bit on ‘reacted like me’? In what sense?
>
> **Hussein:** Like you allowed me to speak, OK? If you have your ideas, you gave your idea. You didn’t try to impose your idea on me or your ideology or your thoughts or anything imposed on me. If you’re not agree, fine, you have given me your own idea in a polite way. So that was acceptable. So in this way if someone conducts an interview, either he or she or atheist or Muslim or non-Muslim or Shi’a or Sunni, it’s fine.”

The emotional attachment to the sacred text may explain the sensitivity around being asked and expected to answer about verses from one’s holy book. Feysal, for example, said,

> “When several times where I said, ‘I’m not sure where I remember this from’,
>
> and I’m perfectly happy saying that.

I may have felt,

I'm likely to have felt

slightly embarrassed speaking to a Muslim."

In all these examples, participants who either preferred being interviewed by someone from the same faith or those who felt more favourably towards being interviewed by someone from a different faith, all shared a common theme: that they were looking for a non-judgmental interview setting where their personal opinions connected to what they hold dear are freely voiced and respected. That setting was portrayed by some of them to be a setting with both interviewer and interviewee of the same faith where the same 'language' of beliefs is used. Interestingly, others thought that being interviewed by someone from a different faith allowed for more freedom and fewer chances of being criticised or judged for 'not following the proper understanding' (that of the interviewer). Mostapha, who had equally no problem being interviewed by Muslim or Christian interviewers, expressed his reservations on being interviewed by an atheist saying, "but for an atheist, at the end of the day, I will always have a thought in advance in my mind, all the time, that this person, his belief ridicules my belief, that 'what you're talking about doesn't exist'. So I think I wouldn't be comfortable if the interviewer was an atheist." For Mostapha, a Christian or Muslim interviewer would not ridicule the basic assumption of the existence of a god, and to him that was enough to hold a comfortable discussion around social issues anchored in religious texts.

Personal Reflection

It is unclear whether it is the similarity/difference in faith that is at play here or whether it is the actual faith of the interviewer. Some faith paradigms are more personal and flexible than others. Some faiths would be more likely than other faiths to accept that people may relate to the/a deity in different ways while other faiths are more prescriptive with very clear rights and wrongs.

The scope of the focus of this research does not have room for such inquiry but it would be interesting to see whether certain personal beliefs (on the side of the interviewer) can make them better or worse interviewers (perhaps especially with interviewees from other faith backgrounds) in order for the interview setting to be relaxing, empowering, non-threatening or judging.

What seems to confirm that it is the attitude that makes the difference is Feysal's suggestion that the researcher should introduce himself to subsequent Muslim interviewees as being 'Coptic Christian' (and not only Christian). He maintained that with an Arabic sounding name and an Egyptian nationality, potential Muslim interviewees may assume the researcher was Muslim and converted to Christianity. He continued to explain that some Islamophobic attacks come from those who converted, since they may be expected to have personal negative emotions against Islam.

Personal Reflection

Am I comfortable describing myself as a 'Coptic Christian'? I noticed that I would answer 'Yes' if asked by someone in the West whether I was Coptic; however, while living in Egypt, I never identified myself as a Coptic Christian. The church I go to is not the Coptic Orthodox church, and the 'identity' seems different to me and has different connotations. It is one of those moments when I asked myself who and what exactly I was, and I felt how difficult it is to find a label that means the same thing to me and to others. As a compromise, I introduced myself to the subsequent participants as someone who is and has always been a Christian and that I was born to a Christian family in Egypt. It was my feeling that that description was more true to who I was and to how comfortable I was with the label I would have as part of my identity.

It is also noticeable here that my identity, according to Feysal at least, was not mainly about who I am; it was, rather, to do with who I am not (as in: I am not someone who will attack Islamic teachings).

Whether it was the perceived identity of the interviewer that would help the potential interviewees assess his or her attitude (for example, through the faith, level of maturity, or how religious he or she is) or the dynamic interaction during the interview itself (allowing interviewees to express their opinions, not imposing his/hers), it is clear that participants explored the attitude of the interviewer before and/or during the interview, and based on that they might have decided not to take part, or they might have decided to engage differently.

4.3.3 The interactional dynamics (features acknowledging the influence of the specific relation between the interviewer and the interviewee)

4.3.3.1 Referring to people or notions or entities thought to be mutually known

Throughout the interviews, some interviewees made some references to entities, people, or things that were expected to be mutually known to the interviewee and the interviewer. In 17 interviews there were 43 instances of references that would not be understood if another interviewer had been conducting the interview. Those references were not faith-specific; they were, rather, specific to the two people in the interview setting and to the manifestness of such knowledge of entities to both.

For example, there were references by name to colleagues (Liz, Omar, Aya, Kala, Maryam and Hassan), to family members known to the interviewer (Aya and Kala), to a particular initiative at the University (Omar), to an Egyptian movie thought to be known to the interviewer (Hassan), among others. For example, Hassan referred to a colleague whose pseudonym is used here: “It’s [Nabeel] who told me I’m conservative.” Maryam said, “This means Alhamdu-lellah; I always say to [Sofia] that’s one of my favourite words.” In these examples the interviewee seemed to expect the interviewer to know to whom he/she was referring.

There were also references to some political events in Cairo that the interviewee (Boules) seemed to expect the interviewer to know; therefore, they were mentioned without introductions or background explanation. Some participants (Shenouda and Mohammad)

also talked about local charities thought to be familiar enough for the interviewer not to need any explanation. Some specific lines from TV commercials were quoted (by Mohammad and Medhat, for example) with minimal explanation.

In some instances, Nardine referred to Christian Egyptian leaders, Arabic Christian channel names, and Christian TV series that she expected the interviewer to know. It is unlikely that Nardine would mention the names the way she did if the interviewer was of a different nationality, for example (or even a different denomination within the Christian Egyptian community).

Some participants referred to something that they had personally been through without introducing it in detail with the presumption that the interviewer was aware of it. For example, Mohammad referred to a misunderstanding that happened between him and his mother "after the accident." In his reference to "the accident" he knew that the interviewer was aware of which accident he meant. Medhat talked about details of photography which is his hobby without the need to introduce it. Hussein said, "Yeah, something's happened recently with one of my colleagues in the room as well" and by "the room" he meant the postgraduate students' room. He did not need to explain that, and it was clear that the interviewer was expected to be on the same wavelength.

It is clear from the previous examples that the interaction taking place in each interview setting built some of it on the mutual knowledge of the two engaging in the interview and that it was not simply limited to a set of questions and answers. This also shows that the dialogue was similar to that of a genuine conversation where inter-actants accommodated their speech to cater to the needs and knowledge of the hearer.

4.3.3.2 The role of sharing the same faith with that of the interviewer's

The faith of the interviewer has been referred to, in detail, in section 4.3.2.2 under 'who the interviewer is'. Whether the interviewees shared their faith with the interviewer or not, the

fact that they agreed to take part in the study seems to have led each interviewee to think of the overlapping circles where rapport was built to lead to a smooth discussion.

It could be this rapport that led Omar, for example, to think of positive aspects in the interviewer's identity to draw upon. He said, "You are a good candidate to conduct the interview, as you were able to help me decipher the texts. I'm not a theologian myself, but I'm happy you're here because you've got the best of the two worlds, or actually the three worlds: you speak Arabic, you were born and raised in Egypt, you are a Christian, and you've lived in England. So you actually helped me understand the texts." While the interviewer does not share the same beliefs with Omar, it seemed that Omar saw the interview in positive light based on some background conducive to an enlightening discussion where he himself was helped to "understand the texts."

Mirium maintained that the interviewer's subscription to one of the Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) made the conversation run well, and Mostapha argued that the basic belief in the existence of God made the discussion easier than it would have been with an atheist interviewer.

In these examples, the interviewer seems to be seen as more than a gender, nationality and religion. He was even seen to be more than the sum of those identity circles. Interviewees were looking for some justification to explain the rapport built during the interview whether due to or even despite the faith of the interviewer. Some interviewees referred to the fact that they knew the interviewer from before (for example, Medhat, Nardine and Mostapha), they trusted the ethics of a PhD project (Feysal) or they related to the interviewer's culture of origin (Mirium).

Personal Refection

An interesting question is which group of interviewees I am closer to in terms of 'identity' or 'affiliation'? I could be obviously the closest to Christian Egyptian males. However, do they

consider me an insider? Does doing my research in the UK make me closer to the UK participants? Does it make me an outsider to those Christian Egyptian males who stayed in Cairo? To those Muslim interviewees who work at the University, am I an equal colleague who is of a different religion? Or am I a total stranger who comes from a different country and has a different set of religious beliefs?

One interesting example is what Liz said about the fact that she and the interviewer have a similar worldview and therefore she felt comfortable and not defensive during the interview. Here is an example of the interviewer being an in-group member for the fact that he is a Christian. Having come from another country and being of the opposite gender didn't seem at least in this instance to be foregrounded in her assessment of Us and Them. In this case the in-group/out-group criteria brought religion to the focus and led her to this view.

4.3.3.3 Interviewee asks the interviewer (role reversal)

In eight interviews, there were instances of the interviewee asking the interviewer about his opinion. Such a dynamic seemed to flow naturally during the discussion leading to what could be seen as role reversal (Abell and Myers, 2008). The interviewer engaged with these questions and answered them as he would in a daily conversation. For example, part of the dialogue with Liz went as follows:

> "**Liz:** Erm. 'A little lower than the angels' [a 2-second pause], I've never really understood that verse if I'm absolutely honest. What do you understand by it?
>
> **Interviewer:** Erm, I think the angels would be like the highest, so we're just a little lower than them, so we're very, very high.
>
> **Liz:** Yeah."

This reversal of role that can be even seen by that 'Yeah' confirming listening to the interviewer (in his role as interviewee in this instance) shows that the conversation was natural. It also shows that Liz did not find it problematic not to understand part of the verse, and in a total indication of honesty she bounced the question back. Perhaps this indicated

the co-construction of knowledge that is usually the case when people engage in their daily dialogues. Commenting on the use of the phrase ‘God willing’, Nardine asked, “How would you handle this, then? What is the alternative?” in another instance of a dialogue between two equals sharing their opinions. Mirium also engaged in the conversation and seemed to weigh the interviewer’s opinion that ‘the Children of Adam’ in one verse meant ‘humans’ and not necessarily followers of the Abrahamic faiths.

Some participants asked the interviewer about the Arabic translations of the Bible (Nancy), about how he selected the verses (Hassan, Maryam, Mirium and Mohammad), and also about other research concepts such as the inclusion and exclusion criteria of participants (Mirium, who is a researcher herself). Some of those questions were asked at the end of the interview (for example, Mohammad asking about how the verses were selected, and Mirium asking about the research design). However, most of the rest of the questions featured during the discussion. It was clear from those instances that they resembled a natural conversation (and not, for example, a job interview where an interviewee waits till the end of the interview to be given the chance to ask questions). It is also worth noting that those questions were not simply questions asking for clarification (there were other instances of those as well). They, rather, were about some new content that the interviewer was asked to give (be it his opinions, or some background from his country or language, or his understanding of some texts). Some questions were even asked by the interviewee to add depth to the interview; here is an example from Raheel:

> “**Raheel:** At the end of the day, what makes us different from animals and humans? But just because we’re able to understand things better, but how different are they really? And why do we need such things in the first place?
>
> **Interviewer:** Well, the Christian view will have an answer to this.
>
> **Raheel:** Which is?”

It is interesting to see this dynamic in the conversation which continued with the interviewer giving what he thought to be the Christian answers to those questions. This blurring of

borders between the roles of interviewer/interviewee suggests that the interaction was natural, and it also suggests that the interviewees were aware of the identity as well as the specifics of the interviewer.

4.3.3.4 Interviewee acknowledges the input of the interviewer to the discussion

Eighteen interviewees referred explicitly to the role played by the interviewer in the discussion. Some commented on the interviewer's cultural background (Mirium, Feysal, Nabila and Omar), Arabic language mastery (Omar), or simply the manners in which the interviews were conducted (Mirium, Nabila and Hussein) with the suggestion that those elements contributed some input by the interviewer to the discussion.

The follow-up questions that were used in the interviews were perceived by Youssef to be something that helped him with his thoughts. He said, "Even when you challenged some of my thoughts, I didn't, I didn't feel worried or anxious, on the contrary, I felt it was very normal. I liked that you criticised the idea so I could think of it from a different angle. I mean, very nice to look at it from a different angle."

These examples show the interviewees' awareness of the presence of the interviewer, not simply as someone with questions that need answers, but as a conversation partner (Rubin and Rubin, 2012) whose input can influence the course and content of the discussion. This awareness is not limited to the importance and effect of what the interviewer says but also to his response to how the interviewee handles something from their holy book that they are, for example, not sure of (Feysal commented on that in his discussion on the influence of the interviewer's faith and the relative levels of religious knowledge on the side of the interviewee.).

The next chapter discusses in more detail all these data in light of the research question and the research objectives. It brings in the data, the discussed literature, and the research aim and objectives together in a concluding and more comprehensive discussion.

Chapter 5 Discussion

This chapter examines the findings and the commentary reported on in the previous chapter, in light of the literature and with the research question and research aim and objectives in mind.

This research has set out to answer the Research Question: What are the benefits and challenges of using sacred texts as tools to enhance social research interviews? To answer the research question, the empirical study was conducted with the three set objectives: to

1. Examine the interview dynamics (including the interviewer–interviewee relationship) where sacred texts are used to start and sustain a discussion.

2. Understand instances where the interviewee shows empowerment and ownership of the discussion.

3. Assess the richness, nuances, and variety of the data gathered in the interviews.

This section discusses three main themes that recap the main findings in the data, and then the discussion culminates by answering the research question through the lenses of the empirical data gathered and the literature reviewed.

5.1 Main findings recap

The codes and themes discussed in the previous chapter point at three major findings that can explain the dynamics and nature of the content observed in this empirical study. These three major findings are: the familiarity with and knowledge of the sacred texts, a sense of the interviewee's ownership of and empowerment in the discussion, and acknowledging the role of the interviewer in sacred-text-based social research interviews.

5.1.1 Familiarity with and knowledge of the sacred texts

Familiarity with the sacred book and with the verses used explains much of the interview dynamics across the 28 interviews. While the participants' recruitment stage involved making sure that participants self-identified as Christians or Muslims, establishing to what extent each was familiar with their sacred book (and more so with the specific verses used in this research) was not practically possible prior to the actual interviews.

The position of the sacred texts in one's life

At the beginning of each interview, the participant was asked to give some background information (most of which was demographic, such as their age, marital status, nationality(ies), job, education, etc.). They were also asked a specific question: What does the Bible represent to you? (for Christian participants) or What does the Quran represent to you? (for Muslim participants). That was one point where familiarity with the book was mentioned, and it ranged from considering it to be a good book all the way to believing in its centrality in one's life. Some participants also reported on the extent, if at all, they memorised their sacred book.

During the interview

The main indicators of each participant's familiarity with and knowledge of the book were the techniques they used to answer some questions and tackle some parts of the conversation. Following are some of these dynamics.

Quoting other parts of the sacred teachings

The contexts in which the participants quoted other parts of the sacred teachings suggest that they supported their arguments by referring to other parts of the sacred teaching that treat the issue with a similar approach. It also showed a more comprehensive understanding of the faith when the quotes seemed to suggest another angle to the issue discussed. This knowledge that seemed in some interviews to be bordering on mastery of the book

contributed much to the flow of the conversation, because a participant who was familiar with their book always had something to say to support, further, or counterargue some opinions.

This technique also supports the theoretical argument of Relevance Theory (Sperber and Wilson, 2004) and the guarantee of a context rich enough for the participant to draw upon to sustain the conversation.

Referring to the contexts of the texts

Some participants were also able to figure out the contexts of some verses and tell the background story explaining why and when the verse was said. Such knowledge seemed to give the participants the confidence to carry on the discussion even with the pairs of verses that may seem to some to be of a contrasting nature.

The contexts to which some participants referred ranged from the immediate context (the verse before and after), the chapter, the section (for example, Jesus' Sermon on the Mount), or sometimes the part of the book (for example, the Old Testament). Participants seemed to draw on their knowledge of the context to build their opinions and to sustain the conversation. This added to the flow of the conversation; it also added an element of nuanced meaning where, for example, one verse may be applicable in its historical context more than in the current times.

Referring to other parts of the sacred teachings and/or to the context(s) of some verses seems to suggest a contextualised social setting in the form of a research interview that mimics a casual conversation (Eggins and Slade, 2004). Having a context, that a participant chooses based on their familiarity with their holy book, the specific verses, or both, suggests that their responses were not what Mishler (1991: 5) warned about, namely: the 'decontextualized responses' which can easily be the case in interviews that participants may perceive as less coherent or as covering issues/questions of isolated topics or contexts.

Specific emotions and life events

Some participants were familiar with the very verses used in the research. Some mentioned particular emotions towards some verses, and some reported remembering specific life situations where the verse was quoted. Such personal (and sometimes emotional) links to the verses seemed to contribute to a naturally flowing and richer discussion (for example, when the participant carried on to tell the life event in detail, or when they commented on the reasons for the specific emotion that the verse triggers). It also contributed to the empowerment of the interviewee who can clearly see in this case that the interview prompts used have direct links to their own life.

Participants who were less familiar with the texts

Familiarity with the verses used was not the same with all participants. It is noticeable that participants who were less familiar with the verses were treading with caution in their attempts to explain what the verse could mean. Some questioned who said the verse (for example, Margaret, having read the verse 'Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.'), and some could not see beyond the literal wording of the verse. Some also disagreed with the verse and some reported not understanding the verse.

In cases when a participant was not familiar with the verse, this did not mean that the conversation stopped there; participants were still able to articulate their reasons for disagreeing with the verse (which in some cases produced some rich answers) and were still asked what the verse could mean (for those who did not understand the verse). The two situations referred to here may not have influenced the richness of data *per se*, but they seem to have negatively influenced the flow of the conversation. They may have also resulted in less empowered participants who did probably not feel they fully mastered the texts in question.

The expectations of some familiarity

At the end of each interview, participants were asked about how they felt before and during the interview. Some reported having felt worried they might be unfamiliar with some of the verses used. This concern was echoed in some interviews (and is one legitimate worry that future researchers wishing to use sacred texts in interviews need to be careful about – more on this point in a discussion on recommendations on the use of this research tool in Chapter 6). However, this worry also shows that there could be some expectation that one should be familiar with their sacred book. Such an expectation gives some special strength to using sacred texts as tools in interviews because participants themselves expect to at least be familiar with most if not all concepts of their faith. (Such an expectation does not necessarily exist in other pieces of research where a participant can be totally excused if he or she was not familiar with an interview question or found it irrelevant. It is also the case with research using other prompts such as maps, videos, or photos prepared by the interviewer.)

Therefore, it can be noticed that participants who were familiar with the sacred book were able to sustain the flow of the conversation and seemed to produce a coherent dialogue. They seemed to have engaged in a dialogue where they came equipped with some techniques that were favourable to the flowing nature of a casual conversation. This was obvious when they referred to other parts of the religious teaching, clarified a specific context where the verse was inspired, commented on the genre of the section, or added some nuanced details of the chapter, sermon or paragraph where the verse was taken from. These strategies required such familiarity with and knowledge of the book. When such knowledge seemed to be lacking in some participants, the conversation was less flowing and less coherent.

What such familiarity resulted in also is the empowerment of those participants who were able to use other parts of the sacred teaching in their discussion to support their argument,

add a nuanced angle, or disagree with a literal interpretation. It equipped them with the tools needed to hold the floor longer.

It can also be said with some confidence that this unprompted referencing to other parts of the sacred teaching suggests the contextualisation of the interview setting. In such a setting, the participants chose to refer to other parts of the sacred texts (more than they did famous sayings, proverbs, movie lines, etc.) with their thinking pattern anchoring the discussion around sacred texts and drawing upon the same domain to bring in to the conversation other similar texts. Even though they are presented to the interviewees as individual prompts, the verses springboarded a discussion that was naturally anchored in a bigger whole of which the interviewees were aware, or they at least sought to figure out what the intended message could be. The confidence of the presence of an underlying sense-making meaning can perhaps provide a comfortable environment for the interview.

Referring to other verses also suggests the naturalness of the conversation. Religious speeches and discussions usually have references to other parts of the Scripture that support or shed some different light to an argument. This adds an element of naturalness (or what is called ‘ecological validity’ according to Bryman, 2016) to the research dialogue where a participant can use a similar strategy that they witness at a Friday speech, a Sunday service, a Bible study meeting, etc.

The lookout for an interviewing technique that empowers participants to construct their own worlds and to give their own meanings to their words has touched on this theme of familiarity, and it can be seen in what Mishler (1991: 120) said when he posed the question of ‘how interviewing may be changed so as to be less alienating.’ It can be seen in this research that the less alienating interview setting (in the form of verses familiar to the participants) can be given credit for the flow of the conversation. In this case, the researcher approached the interview setting by entering the interviewee’s world with prompts that were

found to be familiar to them. The more familiar to them, the smoother the interaction seemed to be.

5.1.2 A sense of ownership and empowerment

The fact that participants self-identified as Muslim/Christian seems to explain their sense of ownership (of the holy book they subscribe to) and being proud of the religious teachings they follow.

The interviews were replete with expressions supporting this line of thought, where interviewees referred to central themes in their teachings to show some positive angles to the faith (such as respecting everyone, being merciful, etc.) and to correct some misconceptions that the media may sometimes hold.

The overall interviewee empowerment can be attributed to this sense of ownership where a participant was in a setting where they were discussing a book of which they are proud. Such empowerment may be missing in what Mishler (1991: 117) calls the 'striking asymmetry of power' in the interviewer–interviewee interaction. However, familiarity with the interview prompts was not enough for this empowerment; for example, such a sense of ownership may be lacking if the interview was anchored in a text that the participant is still familiar with (for example, a famous book such as one of the Harry Potter series or a famous cultural saying). This means that familiarity with a certain prompt (be it a text, photo, piece of music, etc.) alone does not necessarily lead to a sense of ownership unless the participant is the maker of such a tool (through, for example, interviewing participants using photos they have taken themselves – as in photo-elicitation, Rose, 2012 – music they have produced themselves, texts they have written themselves (Peng, 2010), etc.). The voluntary subscription to a religious belief seems to give faith followers some sense of pride (otherwise they may not choose to carry on following the same faith, or at least they may not, if asked, self-identify as a faith follower). It is in this sense of pride that participants can be said to have shown their empowerment in the interviews.

Having said that, interviewees who referred to their own culture and/or others seemed to suggest how deeply rooted cultural values can be. Their reference to their cultures as well gave them some ownership of the content when they educated the interviewer about their worldview. However, not all cultural references were necessarily positive.

It can also be argued that the sense of ownership and pride brings with it some depth to the interview data. Most participants talked about personal notions to the extent that some of them said they felt they were ‘exposed’ as they shared some of their personal and emotional deep thoughts. It is this depth that can evidence credible data (Rubin and Rubin, 2012); at the same time, it is that emotional attachment to the texts used that needs to be handled carefully so participants do not feel uncomfortable as a result of sharing something too personal or too deep.

Some of the depth and credibility of data can also be seen in what can be described to be sharing something that paints the participant in a negative light. While participants were not asked explicitly to share negative experiences, some of them recited anecdotes where they were at fault or where they misjudged a situation or were ignorant, etc. in their own eyes. Feeling comfortable enough to share such personal and deep (and at the same time negative) experiences is perhaps an indication of the participants’ sincerity. Such sincerity seems to fit within this context of being in the domain of spirituality where a sacred text is discussed. A faith follower usually comes to the deity and to the holy book with humility, sometimes asking for forgiveness, wisdom, direction, etc.

So this ownership based on the emotional attachment with the sacred text (based on the voluntary subscription to the book and the faith) gives the participant the opportunity to be an empowered conversation partner; at the same time, it seems to remind the participant that they are still created and that they need to maintain enough humility (in the presence of the sacred texts) to share what could paint them in a negative light as imperfect people who make mistakes.

Sharing a negative experience can be an indicator of data credibility, because one can intuitively expect that interviewees in general have the choice to be selective in what stories they tell. In another interviewing context (for example, in a job interview), it is unlikely that an interviewee will feel comfortable enough to share their shortcomings.

On the intellectual level, some participants who did not readily know what the verse meant, asked whether they could guess the meaning. They carried on to give what they thought could be the meaning. Their ownership of the text possibly allowed them this 'licence' to guess what the meaning could be, since it is their faith that they talked about. This perhaps can compare to one's guessing about what their country fellows would do in certain situations or why they behave in a certain way. The difference, perhaps, can be in that introductory phrase 'I am going to guess now' which again points at the willingness of the participant to be sincere about not knowing for sure and being humble in front of their sacred text that he or she does not simply attempt to answer by saying 'just anything' that can sound logical.

Guessing points to the cognitive gain that Relevance Theory (Sperber and Wilson, 2004) refers to (even when more mental effort is needed to get to grips with the meaning). It could be partly because interviewees would like to help the researcher (Rubin and Rubin, 2012), but it can also be linked to their confidence that they have enough sea of knowledge in the domain of their spirituality, and such knowledge can allow them to make educated guesses that are likely to match the general message of the faith.

The voluntary subscription to the holy book seems to give the participants a sense of ownership and pride in their set of beliefs. The confidence that they have in following the 'right' teachings can put them at ease when asked social questions in a context that has their holiest book at the centre. This sense of ownership of and pride in their faith allows for deeper insights in the data, where participants can feel comfortable enough to share what could paint them in some negative light if this can further the discussion. Doing so seems to

stem from the humility they have when facing their highly regarded spiritual text. Such deep data can add to the credibility of the research results and possibly increase the likelihood of taking the interview discussion to more interesting directions based on how comfortable the participant is.

Those participants who expressed some courage to attempt to interpret the verses which were not readily clear to them point out the notion of ownership again. The faith is 'theirs' that they can guess what the meaning behind a verse could be, considering the rest of the religious teaching. They were also honest enough to warn the interviewer that they were about to guess the answer instead of simply giving it as something of which they were sure.

It is perhaps this sense of ownership that allowed the participants in this study to be empowered to think about and discuss texts of spiritual importance to them; at the same time, some of them reported on having positive feelings towards the discussion. This theme of enhancement of the participants' world seems to be a central criterion in Rosenwald's (1985: 682) discussion in his article with the subtitle: 'The Subject's Enhancement as Methodological Criterion.' While such a criterion may refer, according to Rosenwald, to the benefits ordinary people may reap 'from the discoveries of the social science' (in general and perhaps not necessarily limited to participants in a study), the main principle holds.

5.1.3 Acknowledging the role of interviewer

Whether or not the interviewer was of the same faith of the interviewee, the role and input of the interviewer did not go unnoticed in this empirical study. Participants acknowledged, either implicitly or explicitly, that the interview was not one-sided (even when they were empowered as interviewees), and that it was not an extended question-answer style; rather, a conversation-like dialogue was the case (Rubin and Rubin, 2012).

This is clear in some strategies that participants used to get their ideas across. For example, they sometimes checked whether the interviewer was familiar with a certain concept (especially when they were of a different faith). In some cases, participants went through

some of the basics of their faith to bring the interviewer on board the discussion (by explaining, for example, the charity system in Islam, or who Omar Ebn el-Khattab was). Other times they seemed to ignore that, especially with what could be described as general knowledge expected to be available to the interviewer's cognitive environment. In all those instances, interviewees paid special attention to assess the knowledge of the interviewer before elaborating at length on a theme and also before skipping explaining a pivotal notion in their answer. Relevance Theory (Sperber and Wilson, 2004) explains that in terms of the mutual manifestness and the extent to which conversation partners share the same cognitive environment.

While educating the interviewer shows that the interviewees were aware of the role and input of the interviewer, it also links back to the notion of empowerment where the interviewee in this case knows more and is the expert in comparison to the interviewer, perhaps especially when it comes to interviewing someone of a different faith.

Role reversal (Abell and Myers, 2008) also took place. In some instances, the interviewee asked the interviewer for what he thought, and this dynamic in particular suggests that the interview setting was similar to a natural conversation where both conversation partners co-construct the knowledge rather than transfer it from one side to the other (Mishler, 1991; Hewitt, 2007; Webster et al., 2014).

Acknowledging the cultural, faith and even mutual experiences featured in some comments from the interviewees, where they referred, for example, to someone or an entity known to be familiar to the interviewer. This means that with other interviewers, the researcher may not understand what the interviewee is talking about. Conducting the interview with these naturally occurring references to people, entities, places, etc. known to both (interviewer and interviewee) points out how comfortable and authentic the discussion was. It also shows that the interviewees were sensitive in their positioning of the interviewer as a 'person' with whom they may share some experiences apart from the general labels such as gender, religion

and nationality. Some Muslim participants were extra-courteous as to refer to the interviewer's faith (Christianity) and quote some 'similar' teachings, which can be taken to mean that they preferred the discussion to be two-sided and inclusive, catering to the relevance of the interviewer too.

Interviewees were also aware of the possibly different dynamics if they had been interviewed by someone of a different faith, denomination, someone they did not know, etc. Some of them explicitly mentioned that they might have said things differently if interviewed by someone from a different background.

While most interviewees expressed their comfort with the author as interviewer, the reasons seemed to differ. Some Christian interviewees felt that the discussion was comfortable due to the shared faith; some Muslim interviewees, however, felt that the discussion was comfortable simply because the interviewer was of a different faith. Their argument was that as a Christian, the researcher would not have the licence to disagree with what they said or to 'correct' what could be seen as 'misunderstanding' of real Islam if the researcher was Muslim. Some other Muslim interviewees acknowledged that not sharing the faith could be a problem if the interviewer does not handle the interview respectfully.

With the different reasons given, the main factor seemed to be the attitude (rather than the (similarity or difference of) faith of the interviewer). This notion is further confirmed by most participants (whether Muslim or Christian), who did not have a problem being interviewed by an interested atheist who showed enough respect to the faith of the interviewee. This seems to match what Bryman (2016) refers to when he agrees with Kvale's (1996) qualities for good interviewers maintaining that '[w]hat underpins a lot of the desirable qualities of the qualitative interviewer specified by Kvale is that he or she must be a good *listener*' and to be 'non-judgmental' (Bryman, 2016: 471–472). It is also clear from the data that the interviewer's attitude was not perceived to be a static notion (limited to describing friendly or judgmental interviewers), but it was a dynamic notion being assessed throughout the

interview, and perhaps based on the ‘real-time’ attitude of the interviewer, the interviewees adapted their further responses to match the interviewer’s interactions, comments, and responses.

One important conclusion as far as the role of the interviewer is concerned is that such a role is not a minor one. After all, and to use Mishler’s (1991: 43) expression, interviews are ‘jointly produced discourse’, and perhaps research interviewers need to embrace and celebrate rather than try to avoid or minimise their role in engaging the participants in a naturally occurring dialogue as much as possible.

5.2 Answering the Research Question!

This discussion brings the Research Question to the centre, and following is the answer that this research has reached. Answering the research question brings in the gathered data and the reviewed literature into a discussion of the practical and theoretical sides of the topic.

Research Question: What are the benefits and challenges of using sacred texts as tools to enhance social research interviews?

5.2.1The benefits of using sacred texts as tools to enhance social research interviews

5.2.1.1 The sustainability of the discussion

Sacred texts, when used in the research interviews in this study, provided the participants with the tools to sustain the discussion, since it prompted them to refer to other parts of the sacred teachings as well as to the contexts where the verses featured in their holy books. It is clear from such strategies that this would not be the case if other prompts were used (such as photos, videos, etc.) due to the nature of what participants quoted (for example, other verses from the Bible and stories of saints and the Prophet). The ‘continuous monologue’ that some participants engaged in (with some digression or lengthy stories) reflects the ‘spontaneity’ that Oppenheim (1992: 67) encourages interviewers to promote.

The nature of the texts used here (being from one's religious teachings) triggered the activation of a relevant domain accessed by the participant. This is in line with Relevance Theory (Sperber and Wilson, 2004) which further maintains that when a domain is activated, different concepts can be accessed, and the encyclopaedic entries in that concept may differ from one person to another based on their background, preferences, personalities and world experiences (Clark, 2013).

This sustainability of the discussion can also be seen with the lens of the contextualisation of interviews (Mishler, 1991) which is believed to provide more credible data and can also help in the thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006), because in this case an analyst can understand the wider context where the discussion took place. In this research, using sacred texts also provided smoother interactions and more flowing discussions in the interview setting. This was evident in interviewing participants who were more familiar than others with their sacred books.

The guarantee of a context was also evident in all interviews. While interviewees came from different backgrounds (in terms of their nationalities, ages, professions, marital statuses, levels of education, and levels of commitment to the religion, among other varied life experiences), each had something to say about the verses used in this research. Regardless of their familiarity with the verses (since some participants seemed more familiar than others, and some verses were generally more familiar than others), the mere subscription to the holy book allowed the discussion to carry on (for an average of 83 minutes per interview).

In Social Constructionism terms, Burr (1999: 115) explains that '[i]t is language that allows people who share a common tongue to generate a common currency of concepts and meanings. It is through their dealings in this common currency that people fabricate their world.' This can also be extended to the religious discourse drawn upon during the interview setting (perhaps especially when the interviewer and interviewee share the same faith.) In

this case, it is not only the language but also the faith repertoire that is seen as common currency that interviewees can use in their interaction.

5.2.1.2 The production of a variety of output and multi-layered meanings

It is evident from the data that a variety of output was produced during the interviews. The differences are not along national cultural lines, age groups or any other categorisation; rather, it seems that each interviewee's life experience provided for a wealth of anecdotes, examples and lessons to draw upon while discussing the verses. This is what the literature on high-quality interviews advises interviewers to look for: some output 'that has depth and detail and is nuanced and rich with vivid thematic material.' (Rubin and Rubin, 2012: 101)

While those personal differences are likely to be the case in a lot of social interviews (after all, it is one's background that he or she will draw upon to answer about social issues), it was clear that those personal experiences were communicated in a conversation anchored in the texts. Interviewees went back and forth to and from the verses which shows again the contextualisation of the interviews (even with different contexts across the interviews). They brought their personal stories, examples, and emotions to the texts in their discussion.

The notion of the 'death of the author' (Burr, 2001) seemed to feature practically in the in-depth interviews since even with the same verses, the foci were different across the different interviews. From discussing fostering through remembering the genocide in Rwanda, participants drew upon their personal experiences rather than only on what the text 'said'. What the text communicated seemed to go through the filter of each participant's life experiences, understanding, culture and preferences, which were all projected onto the text to provide what it communicated. From the literature on high-quality interviewing, this is supported by Rubin and Rubin (2012: 14) who maintain that 'things are going well when you are getting thoughtful and detailed answers. Better yet, interviews are working when the conversational partners point out subtleties or suggest new themes to you.'

5.2.1.3 The favourable perception by the interviewees

Interviewees reported on having enjoyed the discussions and went beyond the expected comment of 'I hope this was helpful to you' to the feeling that they benefited, and some of them even reported on having learned new insights. Rubin and Rubin (2012: 114) believe that '[w]hen conversational partners reach out, touch your shoulder, say, "it was fun," and invite you back, you know that the interview succeeded' and that was evident in the data, where participants expressed that they enjoyed being interviewed and talking about their personal opinions.

This ties in with what Relevance Theory (Sperber and Wilson, 2004) called the cognitive gain, and strangely enough it is the cognitive gain of the hearer (the interviewee) that would produce such enjoyment that rewards the mental efforts they exerted to unpack the texts. This goes beyond the typical benefit to the researcher who would, in some conventional interview settings, get the information he or she is after, sometimes leaving the interviewees with nothing in return (Rubin and Rubin, 2012).

The favourable perception of the interviews can also be explained by Social Constructionism, since those participants (especially the ones that were more familiar with the texts, or especially with the texts they were more familiar with) were able to construct (or rather co-construct) one side of their multiple realities. Using their language (and the general discourse of their sacred teachings), they spoke their worlds into existence, and that in itself can be satisfying. It can be argued that this is the reason why generally speaking some discussions can be more interesting than others; because in a real extended conversation, the dynamics are not simply limited to a question-and-answer approach, where an interviewee expresses what they already know. In a real discussion, what they know is indeed constructed using language.

This came in from a position of empowerment since each participant was either as or more experienced than the interviewer as far as their faith was concerned. It can be argued that

this empowerment (featuring in leading the discussion in different directions, digressing and educating the interviewer on issues where he is inexperienced) featured differently based on one's faith. Christian participants, who shared the same faith with the interviewer, felt comfortable because they knew they were understood. They had this expectation of the mutual manifestness (or at least the shared cognitive environment) that Relevance Theory (Sperber and Wilson, 2004) describes; they expected certain things to be 'clear' in the mutual cognitive environment (of the interviewer and interviewee) since they share the same set of beliefs. Therefore, they did not feel the need to explain 'obvious' things, and it can be argued that they went for deeper discussions with the presumption that the 'superficial explanation of honouring parents, for example' would not be needed with a Christian interviewer. They perhaps attempted to co-construct a more interesting and intellectually stimulating discussion without the need to explain the basics to their interlocutor (a Christian interviewer).

Muslim interviewees, on the other hand, were empowered from a totally different angle; they literally knew more. They were the experts in the room (or the 'teachers' in Kleinman and Copp's (1993: 29) words) when it came to Islamic teachings, stories and practices. They had the licence to educate and illuminate the interviewer, who in turn had the licence for the lack of knowledge being a 'student' (Hoffmann, 2007: 323) or an 'outsider' (Hermanowicz, 2002:486) in this case. As one Muslim interviewee put it: It would be "remarkable for you, for a Coptic Christian, to know;" so in general, Muslim interviewees were comfortable enough to share their personal beliefs about Quranic verses, the interpretation of which could be contested if the interviewer were a Muslim (especially from a different denomination/sect). This seems to match what photo-elicitation technique promotes, namely the empowerment and authority of the participant (Harper, 2002) who is considered the expert (Rose, 2012) when he or she brings their own photos to discuss in an interview (such as in Fitzgerald, 2016 and Whiting, 2016).

The fact that the interviewees were asked and expected to give their personal thoughts and not the official Christian/Islamic stance on the verses discussed, allowed each of them the freedom to draw upon their own experiences. Talking about personal stories in such a sacred context also seems to add legitimacy to the personal stories; they can be told in the presence of holy texts.

While the favourable perception of the interview setting can be partially attributed to some good interviewing manners (such as good listening abilities, Kvale, 1996; Bryman, 2016), the observation that all the discussions were anchored around the verses used (and others referred to by the participants) gives the reassurance that using sacred texts as tools in social research interviews at least does not hinder what otherwise could be a favourable experience.

In Relevance Theory (Sperber and Wilson, 2004) terms, a comfortable interviewee may not in fact mind exerting even some extra mental processing effort to reach better and deeper insights. The data show some instances of interviewees commenting on thinking about the issue for the first time or thinking in depth more than they would usually apply or providing some shades of meaning in their expression of the richness of the texts. In this case, more mental processing effort can be justified (in Relevance Theory terms) if the cognitive gain is high (or could be made higher). Rather than jumping at the first possible explanation, or simply giving the interviewer the answers he or she seems to be after (Orne, 1962), a hearer can reflect, analyse and reach some deeper or alternative explanations if the cognitive gain is worthwhile the effort.

It is also worth noting here that I, the researcher, enjoyed myself during all the 28 interviews, perhaps in varying degrees, and it is unlikely that this is totally attributable only to good, interactive participants. Whether with people from the same faith or with participants of a different faith, engaging with people and listening and responding to their stories and thoughts was a favourable experience. There was also the reassurance of a reference point

that the discussion could go back to if there was no further thing to add, namely: a laminated card with a verse on it.

Personal Reflection

I enjoyed conducting the interviews and analysing the video data. While watching the interview materials, I recalled the moments of laughter, deep discussions and the genuine exchanges I had with almost all of the participants. I find Rubin and Rubin's (2012: 114) comment on successful interviews echo my experience in this research. They say:

> 'Finally, you know that the interviews are working when you feel absorbed and excited as you reread your transcripts or notes and have a strong desire to share what you have learned with others.'

Of course this 'desire to share' what I have learned with others is not purely attributed to the interviews having worked well, because my positive desire can be related to the rest of the research, the weight of the degree anticipated, the readings, among many other things. However, I do notice that conducting the interviews and analysing them were not tasks that I wanted to avoid. It has been an enjoyable experience!

5.2.1.4 The possibility of an information gap

The literature on qualitative interviewing commends the existence of an information gap (Abell and Myers, 2008) and such a gap can give the interviewee the luxury to elaborate to educate the interviewer and it can also be exciting for the interviewer. This can result in a role reversal which can balance the power distance between the interviewer (who may otherwise be perceived as the expert) and the interviewee (who may also otherwise be perceived as someone who may add only a little to the extensive information held by the researcher in the field).

Such an information gap is almost always guaranteed when interviewing someone from a different faith group. No matter how well versed the researcher may be in the other's faith, the initial perception is more likely to expect the interviewee to know more about their

religion if interviewed by someone from a different religion. This is especially true if the interview setting is not in the format of a debate (where perhaps the interviewee may fear a more knowledgeable interviewer). This can be reassured by the pre-interview information sheet, and the attitude of the interviewer throughout the interview. The interviewer's attitude seems to feature much in the empirical data of this study and confirms what the qualitative interviewing literature maintains about the interviewer's interviewing manners in general (Kvale, 1996, Rubin and Rubin, 2012 and Bryman, 2016). It can be argued that participants in general do not mind being interviewed by someone from any background, if he or she is friendly, not judgmental, and allows for personal thoughts to be voiced without attacking, ridiculing or trying to 'correct' the interviewee's output. In a way, this further empowers the participant, which in turn can result in production of more insights and some deeper discussions.

5.2.1.5 The possibility of the multiple use of the tool in similar or different topics

In comparison to other creative research methods, sacred texts are less likely to lose their novelty as enhancement tools in the social research interviews. This is partly because the texts themselves are not generally perceived to be 'new' at all. There are no 'tricks' that the interviewee can uncover after the first or second verse in order to apply certain strategies to go through the rest of the interview. Even if the interviewee is invited to take part in another sacred-text-based research, the newness of the enhancing technique may not wear off.

This is evident in the practice of Scriptural Reasoning (Ford, 2006) where people from different faiths come together to discuss one theme from each one's scriptures. It is also evident with the religious practices of meditating on the scripture, discussing social issues from a religious perspective, and all the books, conferences, programmes and religious activities that revolve around or include their sacred texts. The data in this study also refer to the willingness of some interviewees to be 'interviewed again' with another set of verses. Because of its ecological validity (Bryman, 2016) (i.e. the used tool and the research setting mimic a real-life practice where people of the same faith come together and discuss their

religious texts in one form or another), the multiple use of sacred texts is possible and gives such an enhancing technique a longer 'shelf-life' as it were.

The wide range tackled in holy books such as the Bible and the Quran (and in some other religious or holy teachings such as Confucian teachings) can guarantee a wealth of topics and a huge resource for social discussions. While some verses cannot be used in this capacity (due to their limiting themes or specific instructions), there are hundreds of others that can be used in a variety of research areas in the social sciences.

Other enhancement tools may lose their usability in social research interviews with the same participants despite (or perhaps due to) their creative approach. For example, it can be exciting to be given a video camera to capture some moments in one's life (as done in some research such as Whiting, 2016); however, this excitement may fade away if the interviewee is approached again with the same technique. The same thing may happen too with Rorschach's technique (Weiner, 2003) when one is interviewed for a second time with another set of inkblots.

Personal Reflection

My personal experience with being interviewed using the Clean Language technique (Sullivan and Rees, 2011) can shed some light on this very point. As explained in section 2.1.4, in Clean Language, the interviewer asks questions that are phrased in a fixed way, and these questions are usually around the metaphors produced by the interviewee. In an event that involved a series of four 30-minute interviews on different days, I caught myself especially on the third and fourth days trying (as interviewee) to avoid using metaphors so that I would not be prompted by yet another fixed question (with what seemed to me to be a less natural way of having a dialogue). The fact that I had been aware of the technique made me feel that the questions were not genuine, and while the interviewer seemed (and possibly was) genuinely interested in what I had to say, my feeling was that he was not listening to me but listening to 'spot any metaphor' that he could ask a following question about.

5.2.1.6 The expectation of a more justified typicality in participants' recruitment

Using sacred texts as tools in research interviews seems to facilitate the process of participants' recruitment in some social sciences studies. Participants need to simply self-identify, and based on their professed religion, they are given the relevant texts. This provides more accuracy in comparison to recruiting participants based on their nationalities only. Unlike nationalities, religions do provide some general guidelines that a researcher can be confident about expecting his or her participants to agree with. Nationalities, on the other hand, do not provide such confidence, as it is very difficult to pin down what may be meant by 'British values', for example.

5.2.2 The challenges of using sacred texts as tools to enhance social research interviews

5.2.2.1 The need for special kinds of interviewers and interviewees

Because of the extended-conversation-like nature of interviews enhanced by sacred texts, it is argued that, like a natural conversation, the success of the interaction will depend on the interlocutors (since they engage in some sort of 'partnership' in Rubin and Rubin's, 2012, expression). Clearly, not all people can be recruited for inclusion in a social research study using sacred texts, nor can all researchers conduct such interviews. Following are some expectations required of interviewers and interviewees engaging in a sacred-text-based interview.

Interviewees are expected to have some familiarity with the texts used or at least with the general message of the holy book. This is the reason that for this study, participants were recruited by approaching Christians and Muslims because they are more likely to have participants who subscribe to the texts used in this study and can be familiar with them (Geiger, 2017). This by nature excludes atheists (and people of other faiths, such as Buddhists, Hindus and others, who have their own sacred teachings and/or texts). It is, however, worth noting here that no research can or should be inclusive of all humans. After all, there are some basic criteria that are expected from interviewees, and such criteria are

by no means universal (for example, they need to be able to communicate in a language understood by the researcher or a translator; they have to be able to speak and listen and attend an interview whether in person or virtually). In an ideal situation (and to transfer the insights gained in this study), approaching participants should be done the other way around: the participants in whose interviewing the researcher is interested should be approached with some of their favourite texts (i.e. texts that are considered sacred or at least significant to them). This means that in future research, researchers are less likely to look for Christians to interview using the Bible; they, rather, should be looking for sacred texts relevant to their participants of choice (if they are Christian, then the Bible will be the choice, if they are Muslim, then the Quran, and so on). This can be extended, albeit with perhaps different dynamics, to fans of certain texts such as Harry Potter, and the like. While fans are not as likely as faith followers to commit emotionally to the texts, they can still exhibit some familiarity with the text, and they can engage in an interview contextualised in a bigger whole: that of the whole world of Harry Potter, for example.

Interviewees who still subscribe to the text as sacred but do not have familiarity enough to sustain the conversation may struggle through the interview and be of little benefit to the research. They may also feel less able to have something to say to contribute to a naturally flowing dialogue where the more familiar participants can draw upon thoughts from various parts of the sacred teaching. From a Relevance Theory (Sperber and Wilson, 2004) viewpoint, their contexts in this case will be limited, so they may not find enough output to maintain an extended conversation. Alternatively, they may try and exert more processing efforts to access other contexts; however, this may not result in a naturally flowing exchange.

As far as the interviewers are concerned, the data in this study have shown that participants are sensitive to the attitude of the interviewer more than they are towards his knowledge, gender, faith, nationality or age. This is confirmed by the literature (for example, Holstein and Gubrium (1995) who argue for the importance of the mutual interest to build rapport), but it

can also be seen from a Relevance Theory (Sperber and Wilson, 2004) angle where the mutual cognitive environment is not necessarily based on sharing the same faith with the interviewee, but merely being interested in knowing about what he or she knows. This satisfies what the qualitative interviewing literature advises about coming to some common ground with the interviewee (Mishler, 1991; Holstein and Gubrium, 1995), and this common ground or rapport can be built around being interested in (rather than necessarily following) the same faith. This can perhaps help with cases where the interviewer is of a different (or no) faith. However, interviewers who hold no faith at all or who ridicule the idea of having one may find it difficult to relate to participants and further empower and encourage them to freely express their personal thoughts. They may also find it challenging to contribute to the discussion via their own personal input since their worldview may be, in this case, quite different to that of their participants. Moreover, the authenticity of a researcher's interest in engaging in a discussion using religious texts may be questioned when potential participants know that he or she is of no faith.

It is not impossible to interview atheists using sacred texts; it all depends on how interested they are in investing some of their time to discuss texts to which they do not subscribe. The perceived sacredness of the texts may be missing, but the emotional attachment can still be there if for some reason they have invested some time and effort prior to the interview to engage with the texts. This could be through refuting rather than subscribing to the texts.

The same could be said of atheist interviewers who can be interested in knowing more about their religious interviewees. They need to be clear and genuine about their interest, and they need to provide an interview setting that allows participants to freely express their personal and religious beliefs in a non-threatening non-judgmental environment (Chew-Graham et al., 2002). It can equally be argued that a researcher needs to be in a research setting that is not unsettling to them.

5.2.2.2 The risk of sensitive interactions

The emotional attachment to one's sacred texts can result in sharing some sensitive stories that can lead the discussion to deep and possibly emotionally-burdening instances. An interviewer needs to be sensitive throughout the interview setting and to reassure the participant that they can stop and withdraw at any time. While such sensitivity provides the genuineness and credibility of data, there is an ethical responsibility on researchers to make sure that participants are not unnecessarily stressed (Oliver, 2003; Dyregrov, 2004).

The data gathered in this study featured some laughter across most of the interviews, and positive feedback was always the case. However, there were also some instances of participants sharing some emotional instances they went through, some feelings of guilt where they felt that they did not follow certain commandments in some verses to the standard required, and some stories of struggles in the family. An interviewer using this method needs to remember that empowered participants bring in genuine input to the discussion, and that with this genuineness come sensitivity and depth that could be exhausting and demanding on the interviewee.

The interviewer is not immune against such a sensitive interaction. The case is especially so if the interviewer shares the same faith with the interviewee, since it can be argued that the interviewer in this case is more involved in the same domain of faith and is perceived by the interviewee to be less detached than if he or she was of a different religion. Counter-transference (Gemignani, 2011) could be likely in this case, and an interviewer needs to be cautious and have the support system needed.

5.2.2.3 The possible pre-interview apprehension on the interviewee's side

Some interviewees reported being slightly worried before the interview regarding the content and what was expected of them. While the Information Sheet provided all the necessary information, the weight of the sacred texts seemed to trigger in some potential participants the worry about how they would portray their religion and how they would come across in

case they were asked about a verse with which they were not familiar. One potential candidate was not comfortable taking part in the research before having access to the verses used in the interview. He was not included in the study, but his apprehension is telling of how an invitation to take part in a piece of research involving sacred texts can be perceived.

Therefore, clearer instructions (perhaps in comparison with other non-sacred-text-based research) are required to reassure participants that it is their personal opinions that are targeted and not the official representation of their faith, and that their participation is expected to be in a non-threatening setting (Ryan et al., 2009).

5.2.2.4 The demanding time and effort to select verses

Using sacred texts as tools to enhance social research interviews seems to lend itself to some research areas more than others. If the researchers are more interested in what the participants have to say, and if they are open to any thoughts that may emerge unexpectedly during the interview sessions, then sacred texts can be fruitfully used. This needs to be reflected in the verse selection process. Verses need to be generic enough to seem to carry a range of a concept.

This was more challenging in this study because the research design included two holy books and sets of contrasting verses. The decision to have parallel verses (i.e. verses that seem to carry the same notion across both books) and at the same time to have them in pairs of seemingly contrasting nature made the selection process time consuming. It is, however, understandable that every specific research will have its own criteria of what to include. With that in mind, the dynamics of this study's interviews suggest that the verses selected reflected what participants saw in them more than what 'is' in the verses. It can, however, be argued that the less information density in the verse, the more flexible it can be.

After all it can be noted from this study that the focus is and should be on the participants (rather than the tool). The tool works if it is 'theirs', i.e. if they believe that the verses are

sacred enough and meaningful enough that they can engage with the interviewer in a dialogue where they can explain their personal take on the sacred excerpts.

Throughout this study, the adopted definition of an enhanced interview was as follows: an enhanced interview aims at a flowing conversation that can produce rich and varied data, and, therefore, can be defined as an interviewee-centred interviewee-empowering dialogue contextualised in interviewee-relevant themes.

In light of this definition, it can be seen from the findings, the literature and the detailed discussion presented above that a sacred-text-based interview allows for a flowing conversation (and more so when participants are familiar with the holy book and the verses used). Such a flowing conversation can produce rich and varied data, and, therefore, a sacred-text-based interview is an interviewee-centred interviewee-empowering dialogue contextualised in interviewee-relevant themes. While the adopted definition seems to focus almost only on the interviewee, the data in this study confirm what the literature also argues that the interviewer plays a significant role not only in the dynamics but also in the content of the interviews (Finlay, 2002; Gubrium and Holstein, 2002; Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009; Webster et al., 2014).

The definition, therefore, can benefit from some amendment (added in **bold**) to be as follows:

An enhanced interview aims at a flowing conversation that can produce rich and varied data, and, therefore, can be defined as an **interview that starts as an** interviewee-centred interviewee-empowering dialogue contextualised in interviewee-relevant themes **and progresses to include an equally interested and fully engaged interviewer**.

The next chapter describes some recommendations for the research design and execution of similar studies with some specific examples of research areas and topics. It also presents the limitations of this study and some suggestions for future research.

Chapter 6 Recommendations for the Use of Sacred Texts in Research Interviews

The following practical recommendations can help make the process of using sacred texts in research interviews smoother and perhaps more fruitful according to the aim of each research.

Before getting to the specifics of such recommendations, it can be useful to comment explicitly on the research areas and research approaches and goals that can benefit from using sacred texts as interview-enhancing tools. This section includes specific examples of already conducted research that did not use sacred texts but could have benefited from using them. It also discusses in detail some possible pieces of research that can use sacred texts. In addition to that, the section also highlights general research areas and topics where sacred texts could lead to high quality interviews.

As far as research areas are concerned, sacred texts seem to be useful enhancing tools in the following domains and disciplines: social opinions, ethics, relations, social psychology, studies of culture, religious practices, studying perception of abstract notions such as happiness, success, love, fame, sacrifice, perseverance, home, etc., among many other social sciences topics where interviewing people is the research method. The wide range of themes covered by most sacred teachings (and in this study: the Bible and the Quran) provides a useful breadth and wealth of topics that can be directly or remotely tackled by selecting verses that seem to deal with them.

As far as the research approach and goals are concerned, it seems that sacred texts can be fruitfully used the most in exploratory interview-based research. When the research (or perhaps the first stage thereof) embarks on exploring what the interviewees bring to the table without *a priori* notions that the researcher wants to investigate, the varied and possibly

wide range of notions that can be triggered by the same text can be helpful in this regard. For example, in the empirical research reported on in this study, the verse ‘Honor your father and your mother’ seemed to trigger various notions that were not readily available to the researcher, such as the possibility of having fathers and mothers (in the plural) as a result of the Rwandan participant’s (Talia) experience of the genocide and her having to move from one family to another after her biological family were killed. This shade of parenthood that can be ranked and where more than one father or mother can be compared had not crossed the researcher’s mind until it was mentioned by Talia. When the research aims at exploring possibly new terrains and/or nuances, sacred texts can provide such a platform which the researcher can then follow up if such a terrain is of interest. Oppenheim (1992: 67–68) maintains that

> ‘[a] useful set of exploratory interviews can greatly broaden and deepen the original plan of the research, throw up new dimensions to be studied, suggest new ideas and hypotheses, important differences between groups of respondents and so on.’

It is also worth mentioning that this study has not argued for the superiority of using sacred texts as interview-enhancement tools in comparison with other tools (or in comparison with interviews where researcher-designed questions are used). After all, the empirical side of the study has not empirically compared, for example, the richness and depth gleaned from two different tool-enhancing techniques. It, however, argued its positioning in research interviews based on the initial theoretical assumption and the empirical study that followed that, with the analysis of the data gathered. Bryman (2016: 477) in his comments on using photos in research interviews concludes that ‘there is no way of guaranteeing interesting data in qualitative investigations and … a preparedness to experiment when things do not go quite according to plan can pay dividend.’

6.1 Examples of pieces of research that can benefit from the features of sacred texts

Example 1: 'With refugees' - Using sacred-texts-based interviews with a special research population

A researcher may be interested in exploring some refugees' perception of safety, provision, hope, home, fear or any other abstract concepts. Instead of approaching the interview process with a question such as 'what makes you afraid?' or 'how would you describe safety?', a researcher may choose to present a Biblical verse to Christian refugees, such as 'I will not fear though tens of thousands assail me on every side.' (Psalm 3: 6) or a Quranic verse to Muslim refugees, such as 'there shall be no fear on them, nor shall they grieve' (Al-Baqara 38). It is worth noting here that providing the verse in the participant's choice of language/version can help avoid guiding the discussion in a limited set of paths chosen by the researcher and/or the translator. A translator who may choose to use a word that means 'scared' or 'frightened' or 'worried' may unintentionally lead the discussion into some restricted themes, while the verse can be generic and encompassing. The researcher here investigates a population of interest rather than a specific theme or topic of inquiry.

One reason is that the participants' background may be quite unknown to the researcher, so building a common base to start the interview (as recommended by Mishler, 1991; Holstein and Gubrium, 1995) can prove difficult. However, using a sacred text can bridge this gap as it can be presumed that a self-identified Christian/Muslim refugee can be expected to readily accept a Biblical/Quranic verse to discuss, respectively.

Another reason is that the social sphere of refugees (whether that of pre- or post-fleeing) can be traumatising to discuss. Building the interview around 'tell me what happened' or 'what was your life like?' or 'what was the most frightening situation you have encountered?' and similar questions may lack the sensitivity required at such a delicate time facing that research population. Another reason is that religion may be the last thread to which refugees

are hanging, after fleeing their homes and leaving their countries. This way, a Biblical verse may provide a safe (or safer) point of reference around which a social discussion can be had. The discussion can also be as intimate or as distant as the interviewee chooses to make it. This last point can help in handling a discussion with the needed sensitivity as a participant can always choose to keep the discussion general (i.e. tackling only the universal rather than personal meaning of the verse) avoiding having to refer to specific personal traumatising memories. In this case, a sacred verse can function as if it was a vignette, thereby carrying a not-too-intimate feel (Bradbury-Jones et al. 2014). This, like vignettes, provides participants with a situation, utterance, or story that can be seen from a distance, and in this case, it will not be emotionally taxing.

While this example is specifically about refugees, it also sheds some light on other groups such as prisoners, bereaved parents and survivors of disasters. Such groups need special interview approaches that 'cause least distress' (Dyregrov, 2004: 391).

Example 2: 'With a different culture' - Using sacred-texts-based interviews with a culture different to that of the researcher's

Another example is one that was mentioned before in section 2.1.1, that of a piece of research done by Davies and Bourke (2017). Davies and Bourke asked their participants to draw what represented their identities on postcards, and also to draw what they liked or what made them happy. It is interesting that Davies and Bourke were told by their local helpers not to use the almost-universal symbol of a 'heart' to indicate things one likes; instead they were told that the local symbol is the 'apple'. In such a setting, where researchers are investigating a culture different to theirs, sacred texts could have been a potentially more successful tool to investigate what their participants like and how they perceived their identities. In that context, a Buddhist text could have been used with the Tibetan participants (or a Quranic text with the Muslim participants) to springboard a discussion, and it would have addressed what Davies and Bourke identified, namely: the need of a neutral, culturally appropriate tool to investigate cultures different to that of the researcher's.

While visual methods (Rose, 2002) can be used to ‘avoid using only verbal/textual-based task’ to ‘facilitate communication cross-culturally’ (Davies and Bourke, 2017: 163), Davies and Bourke concluded that visual methods are still cultural. Sacred texts can mitigate this when their transcultural (generic) quality is utilised to prompt a discussion with a targeted population that belongs to a culture different to that of the researchers’.

Example 3: ‘In public health awareness’ - Using sacred-texts-based interviews in a new research field

Another example of sacred-texts-based interviews is the possibility to use them in a piece of research to explore public health awareness issues. For example, a research team may need to explore the prevalent perceptions and attitudes of a population towards a disease and/or a treatment approach. The starting point of such research can benefit from the acceptability of sacred texts as a springboard for discussion, using verses such as ‘I am the Lord who heals you’ (Exodus 15: 26) in the Bible or ‘And when I am ill, it is He who cures me’ (Ash-Shu’ara 80) in the Quran. Starting the interview dialogue with such verses can contextualise the discussion in the bigger domain of God’s provision and can provide an opportunity for a discussion that teases out the attitudes towards health campaigns and the human element of hygiene, prevention and treatment plans.

Using sacred texts in this context can also mitigate the risks of using terminology that may be unacceptable to the target population (as seen in Mertens (2009) where she talks about an initiative to prevent HIV AIDS in Botswana). The difficulties facing research into AIDS (Maier, 1995; Alonso and Koreck, 1989) can be largely overcome, at least in the initial stage of the research, through approaching the target population with texts to which they subscribe. This shows that the researchers are not simply imposing a treatment plan onto the local community; they, instead, approach the population with relevant texts to better understand the field.

This example shows that sacred-texts-based interviews can be used in exploratory inquiries enabling an openness to themes and research directions not readily available to or pre-determined by researchers in the first stages of the research.

Example 4: 'In leadership and management studies' - Using sacred-texts-based interviews to add an element of creativity to familiar study fields

Sacred-texts-based interviews can be used with individuals who subscribe to religious texts to start a discussion on leadership, equality, support, social responsibility, fame, money, business ethics and many other notions related to management. The overlap between religion and social practices justifies starting the dialogue with a sacred text that the interviewee subscribes to and carries a generic reference to the notion the researcher wants to investigate. Leaders and managers who are also religious can be expected to consider their religious teachings in their daily lives, whether the discussion is about moral issues or even about general leadership topics. While the separation of religion and work life can be seen as professional, it is hardly the case that values (including religion-prescribed values) do not contribute to one's professional circles.

This religion/society overlap is supported by the literature; however, it takes different shapes. This overlap ranges from the total separation of religion and society (Hall, 1973; Boyer, 2002), the society's shaping of one's understanding of their religion (Smart, 1979; Barrett, 1996), religion being one component among many in the society, which could result in some sub-cultures (Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005; Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, 2007; Spencer-Oatey and Franklin, 2009), religious backgrounds showing 'significant differences' between the identities of two groups sharing the same nationality (Binks and Ferguson, 2014: 298), religion being the mould where the society is formed (Geertz, 1993), to the inseparable nature of religion and society (Tarakeshwar et al., 2003; Gadami, 2012; Rahman, 2014; Ali, 2015; Eltahawy, 2015). All these arguments point out the links (whether strong or weak) between religion and society.

For example, a study on the perception of manager/subordinate power distance (Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005) in the workplace can be prompted by a verse such as ‘Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all’ (Mark 8: 35). These generic terms (first, very last, and servant) can trigger a discussion rich in what the participant finds significant. At the same time, using a text acceptable by the participant can help direct the discussion to paths of relevance, avoiding the possible misunderstanding of question wording (seen, for example, in the house painting example used by Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, 2007, which is discussed in detail in section 2.3.1).

Example 5: ‘In studies of conflict and inter-religious dialogue’ - Using sacred-texts-based interviews to anchor the discussion around texts approved of by all sides

The existence of themes spanning different sacred texts (discussed in section 2.7.6) provides a promising platform to start discussions in groups of people of different faiths, using sacred texts corresponding to each participant’s sacred book. Here is an example of a theme that is found in different faiths in slightly different wordings in each, and what some refer to as the ‘Golden Rule’ (such as Tyndale, 2003: 22):

The Christian text says, ‘So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you’ (Matthew 7: 12), and the Buddhist text says, ‘Do not treat others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful’ (Udana-Varga 5.18). The Hindu saying is ‘This is the sum of duty: do not do to others what would cause pain if done to you’ (Mahabharata 5: 1517). The same notion, with slightly different words, does exist in Judaism, Islam and Taoism (Tyndale, 2003: 22). Such a feature can provide an efficient starting point in studies on conflict resolution. The practice of Scriptural Reasoning (Ford, 2006) discussed in section 2.7.6 indicates the possibility of gathering people of different faiths around one theme represented in different wordings in each faith. In inter-religious conflict, one main reason behind some heated issues can be a text that gives one group a particular right over another or a text that paints others in a negative light. Using texts that are unifying or encouraging tolerance or calling for peace can lead the discussion to a more reconciliatory direction. While the argument here is

not that the use of sacred texts in these contexts will lead to conflict 'resolution', the very possibility of gathering the two sides over talks can be a step forward (perhaps in the direction of the better understanding of the dynamics of the conflict).

When heated political debates touch upon religiously prescribed rights, the solution is rarely to discard what sacred texts say. Rather, using 'other' texts from the same sacred book may direct the political and social debate to a path of tolerance, reconciliation and possibly better understanding of the underlying issues of the conflict. Alternatively, it can provide some data that can be analysed for the discourse used, the fears raised, and the main themes tackles in a sacred-texts-based dialogue.

6.2 Recommendations for the interviewer

The interviewer needs to have certain qualities before embarking on the use of sacred texts with their interviewees. Here are some qualities that seem to boil down to being a good listener (Kvale, 1996; Bryman, 2016) showing some interest in the participants' personal faith.

While it is not a must that the interviewer him- or herself has any faith (some of the interviewees in this study seemed to suggest that it would make no difference to their answers), an interviewer needs to be at least interested in listening to others talking about their faith. An interviewer who seems cynical or sceptical about something of that personal nature to the interviewee may run the risk of offending his or her participants. This is not only unethical; it is also against the recommendations of the literature where successful interviews are those where an extended conversation takes place (Rubin and Rubin, 2012); and that may not happen if a participant feels uncomfortable or if he or she thinks that their beliefs are being ridiculed. In all cases, it is ethical to inform the potential participants of the researcher's faith if they have any. If they do not, they need to reassure their potential participants that they are interested enough to listen to and discuss somebody else's religious beliefs.

The empirical study here shows that participants who took part were happy to be interviewed by a Christian interviewer, and they also expressed their comfort in sharing their ideas. There were different reasons behind their comfort sharing their ideas about their faith with a Christian (sharing the same faith with some of them and being of a different faith to others). While Christian interviewees expressed that sharing the faith made it easier to communicate, Muslim participants felt comfortable they were not being judged by someone (Muslim) who could be more devout and/or knowledgeable than they were. Muslim participants also pointed out the positive attitude of the interviewer. This seems to suggest the same: interviewers need to show an interested positive attitude with a clear message of wanting to understand more. Interviewees were sensitive to and commented on the interviewer's responses to their stories, and it can be argued that the interviewer's attitude could make or break a genuine natural conversation, perhaps regardless of his/her personal faith.

While interviewees can sense the attitude of the interviewer during the interview setting, it is still important to communicate the research design and aim, before the interview session, as clearly as possible that the potential participants can get a sense of the motive behind a study into their personal religious beliefs. Participants need the reassurance that they are not going to be in a debate setting where their beliefs are going to be put under the microscope to be criticised, refuted or doubted.

6.3 Recommendations for the research design and participants' recruitment

As shown in the findings of this empirical research, participants' familiarity with the texts used (and/or with the whole holy book) seems to be a key contributor to a smooth and naturally flowing conversation. While establishing one's familiarity with sacred texts can be challenging, one way to guarantee more familiarity is to give each participant the choice of verses to select from the ones they are more comfortable discussing. This can perhaps also raise the participant's confidence and lead the discussion to a more interesting direction,

because in this case they will have more to say about their favourite verses. This way, the participant can be even more empowered, not only through discussing their favourite and/or holiest book, but also through discussing the very verses they prefer and/or are more familiar with and/or are more comfortable to talk about.

6.4 Recommendations for the interview process

From an ethical viewpoint, and as mentioned above, an interviewer needs to declare their faith, if they have any, before the interview starts (and ideally in the Information Sheet) so that interviewees can give an informed consent about what they can expect. One opinion may maintain that the less one knows about the interviewer, the more honest they may be in their answers; however, not all cultures may feel comfortable with the same amount of uncertainty (Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005). Besides, if the main purpose of this research setting is to create a conversation-like atmosphere where an interviewee can be comfortable enough to share some of their thoughts about a text so dear to their hearts, an expectation to know about the other 'conversation partner' (Rubin and Rubin, 2012) seems to be justifiable. This has been clearly articulated by Rosaline who maintained that she would need to know about the interviewer since he or she wants to know about her.

Due to the sensitive nature of this type of research (handling sacred texts believed to be inspired by a deity), verses used need to be handled carefully with the most respectful attitude. In this empirical research, the verses were typed on the computer (not hand-written), clearly referenced to where in the holy book the verse has been taken from, accent markers were included in the Arabic verses (which adds clarity to the pronunciation, but it also gives a more 'official' image), and the verses were also laminated. It is worth mentioning that handling sacred books (or even parts of them) could be an issue in itself. Some participants in this research referred to certain practices they observe to show the extra respect they have for their hard copies of the Quran or the Bible (for example, having to go through the Islamic Wudu (ritual washing to purify the body) before touching the Quran and putting it on the highest shelf at home). When a researcher, perhaps unintentionally, shows

less respect to what is to the participant the Word of Allah/God, the interview may not carry on positively, and the interviewee may find it difficult to establish whether the interviewer respects their beliefs or is interested only in collecting some data. This may also cast doubts on the professionalism of the interviewer and to what extent he or she has done the required preparation for the research interview.

Providing the verses separately (not on a page in the actual hard copy of the holy book) can overcome the issue of how an interviewer who may be of a different or no faith handles the participants' sacred book. In this case, it is not the hard copy of the holy book that is handled; it is an extract.

Researchers also need to note that certain cultures hand items differently (with some having to use both hands and others not minding passing things using only one hand). Some consider the left hand less pure (Ferraro and Andreatta, 2014). In handling and handing what is considered sacred to participants (in passing laminated verses across a desk or a table for the interviewee to read), extra care needs to be exercised.

6.5 Limitations of this study

The scope of this study has been limited to some specific angles with a clear Research Question and research objectives. For example, the study has not investigated the dynamics of using the same interview-enhancing technique with focus groups. It has not examined the differences among verses that may be more likely than other verses to produce different output in an interview setting.

Another limitation in this study is shared with other qualitative studies, namely the limited number of participants (in comparison with quantitative studies). While the depth and insights rather than the breadth and generalisability were the targets, it can always be more enriching to interview more participants (if time and resources allow for that).

A more robust analysis can be gained by having more than one researcher, interviewer and/or data analyst. That has not been possible for the purpose of a PhD study; however, in research terms, involving more researchers in qualitative studies can produce more insightful results.

One thing that could have been done differently is to give the participants the choice of verses to discuss. Perhaps they could have been given a range of verses to choose from or they could have been asked to bring in their own favourite verses to the interview setting.

6.6 Suggestions for further research

It will be interesting to examine the use of sacred texts with willing participants who do not subscribe to them. The dynamics may be different when a Muslim participant is dealt a Biblical verse or a Buddhist a Quranic text to comment on.

It will also be interesting if some atheist participants can be interviewed with sacred texts used as prompts, and it will be interesting to see whether sacred texts will, in this case, act as enhancement tools or they will bring the conversation to an awkward place. It is worth commenting on this scenario based on the findings of this study (although it is acknowledged that transferring the findings to new contexts cannot be guaranteed). Theoretically, an atheist who has invested some time and effort in refuting sacred texts may have something to say about those texts if asked in a research interview. In this case, the notion of familiarity that has been discussed at length in this thesis may carry a similar weight. Perhaps the notion of ownership and sense of pride in the set of beliefs may not be there when interviewing an atheist. However, it could be the unbelief that can be as strong as believing in some cases. If the participant is passionate about the text (whether because they believe the text is inspired by the deity or because they think that it misguides people to think so), they are likely to be happy to engage in a discussion involving such texts. (The same ethical approach should be adopted: an atheist needs to be reassured of the aim of the study and that he or she is not targeted so they can ‘be invited to the faith’.)

Perhaps a further piece of research can look at the dynamics with focus groups (whether homogenous or heterogeneous) to see whether a heightened sense of ownership and pride can be found (in the case of homogenous groups), for example, or whether a deeper discussion can take place with a heterogeneous group. The closest to that is Scriptural Reasoning (mentioned briefly in the Literature Review, section 2.7.6) where followers of different faiths (mainly Judaism, Christianity and Islam) come together to discuss one theme from their respective sacred texts.

Chapter 7 Conclusion

This study set out to examine an initial assumption that was built around the literature on qualitative interviewing, communication and features of sacred texts. The initial assumption was that sacred texts have some qualities that make them potential interview-enhancing tools if used in social research with relevant faith followers.

The literature was consulted to examine what enhancing tools are used in social research interviews with a view of the appropriateness of the tools and also their usability in a research context. Sacred texts have some features that are similar to some of the enhancing tools used in research (such as photos, vignettes, etc.); they also seem to have some qualities that give them some advantage over those tools.

An argument has been put forward promoting the possibility of describing people in a society (for the purpose of social research) based on their self-professed religious affiliations along with nationalities, age and other criteria. Such categorisation was argued to provide a more accurate recruiting strategy mainly due to four features common in religious commitments: the existence of a written code that can function as a point of reference (in the form of holy books), the voluntary subscription to the religious identity, the exclusive nature of religious beliefs, and the more credible theoretical links between a religious belief and one's social behaviour. This was argued in comparison with categorising individuals based on their nationalities alone (which seems to be the main categorisation in some social studies).

Relevance Theory was consulted as a theory that explains how cognition and communication take place via inference and how day-to-day utterances are understood and expected to be produced and perceived. This was linked to the features of sacred texts that seem to fulfil some of the main tenets of Relevance Theory (if used to enhance research interviews) such as their accessibility, possible low processing effort needed for their

understanding, and guaranteeing a context in the participants' cognitive environment if they subscribe to the text as sacred.

It has been argued that there is a need for qualitative interviewing settings to mimic natural day-to-day conversations with the focus on themes or prompts that cater for the hearer's (interviewees) needs. Social Constructionism was referred to as the theoretical understanding of how social interactions take place, and it is considered the epistemological stance of the author of how knowledge is co-constructed in an interview setting where participants (along with their interlocutor, an interviewer) speak their worlds into existence using linguistic tools (including the religious discourse) available to them.

The criteria for high-quality in-depth interviews were examined in the qualitative interviewing literature and some features and observations were noted. These features were listened for in the interviews conducted for the empirical side of the research, and other new features emerging in the data were also noted and analysed.

The gap in the literature regarding the use of sacred texts as tools to enhance social research interviews was evident; therefore, there was a need to empirically examine the initial assumption that had started the research inquiry. The Research Question has been: 'What are the benefits and challenges of using sacred texts as tools to enhance social research interviews?' In order to answer the research question, three objectives were set: RO 1: to examine the interview dynamics (including the interviewer–interviewee relationship) where sacred texts are used to start and sustain a discussion; RO 2: to understand instances where the interviewee shows empowerment and ownership of the discussion; and RO 3: to assess the richness, nuances, and variety of the data gathered in the interviews.

The empirical study of this research was in the form of 28 in-depth semi-structured interviews that lasted for an average of 83 minutes each, with 15 Christian and 13 Muslim participants. Participants were recruited using purposive sampling where each needed to meet the criterion of self-identifying as a Christian or a Muslim. Each interview revolved

around three sets of seemingly-contrasting verses selected from the participant's relevant holy book. The three sets of verses tackle three social areas: doing good to others, attitudes to parents, and self-worth.

Video interview data were thematically analysed for a mixture of the codes discussed in the literature and the new features emerging in the data. The findings were presented in three main categories: the What, the How and the Who. The What presented the nature of the content (output) of the interviews from two angles: the coherence (i.e. whether the interviews were contextualised) and the richness (whether the content included data suitable and enough to be analysable) [achieving RO 3 and part of RO 1]. The How investigated the findings linked to the genuineness of the interview interaction and the features of the interviewees' ownership of the discussion [achieving ROs 1 and 2]. The Who explored the identities of both the interviewer and interviewees (in light of the interaction in the interview setting) and their interactional dynamics [achieving RO 1 and part of RO 2].

The data clearly show that sacred texts were fruitful in facilitating interview settings and that the initial assumption based on which this research started is strongly supported by the data. It can be said with confidence that using sacred texts in this study enhanced the interviews. It matches the definition given at the beginning of the research: an enhanced interview aims at a flowing conversation that can produce rich and varied data, and, therefore, can be defined as an interviewee-centred interviewee-empowering dialogue contextualised in interviewee-relevant themes. This definition has been amended to include the influence of an interested interviewer in an enhanced interview.

It was clear in the data that the participant's familiarity with the holy book and/or with the verses used played a role in the interview dynamics (especially as far as the flow of the conversation was concerned). Participants also showed a sense of ownership as the interviews were contextualised in notions they held dear (that of their religious beliefs). The role of the interviewer was also clear in the dynamics of the interviews, and participants

agreed that an interviewer's attitude (that of respect and being interested in listening to their personal beliefs) was more important than the interviewer's gender, nationality or faith (either in itself or in comparison to that of the interviewee's).

Personal Reflection

While finalising this work, a heated debate is currently taking place in my Facebook friends' circles, and it is mainly related to how certain parts of the Bible (especially the first few chapters of the Book of Genesis) are to be interpreted on a spectrum ranging between the literal and the symbolic reading of the Creation account and the historicity of Adam and Eve. Three observations are worth commenting on, with links to the purpose of this research. It is interesting to see how heated the debate is, with some people criticising others of starting a cult or of being too literal and backwards-going. The observation here is how emotionally charged the discussions have been, and I can see that the emotional attachment to the text may explain such an attitude of defending the faith versus enhancing a more scientific approach.

The second observation is the wealth of material to which those involved in the debate referred, with the purpose of defending their position and/or to refute others'. Tens of verses from other parts of the Bible are being quoted, writings of the forefathers and famous Christian writers are used, and references to the society, the youth, the poor and the oppressed are also made.

The third observation is the licence that every Christian has to take part in the debate. It seems from the backgrounds of those involved that the only thing that mattered was the subscription to the Bible as from God. In very few instances, some references to the experts in Hebrew and Greek were made. Other than that, every Christian seemed to be admitted to the conversation without any expertise monopoly.

The final observation is that the debate seems unstoppable. Perhaps this brings in the three previously discussed observations together: an unstoppable debate seems to be the only result if one has: (1) emotionally loaded connection with the text in question, (2) a wealth of material that can be consulted to defend or refute ideas, and (3) no monopoly on who can say what.

This research has achieved its three objectives and has answered the research question from a theoretical as well as an empirical angle. Based on this research, it can be said with confidence that using sacred texts, as tools to enhance social research interviews, can have the following benefits: it can help sustain the discussion; it can facilitate the production of a variety of output with multi-layered meaning; it is well perceived by participants who feel empowered; it can provide a positive information gap on the side of the researcher leading to even more interviewee empowerment; its multiple use is possible without the loss of its novelty; and it can also make the description of individuals for the research purposes easier and more accurate (with some possible links between their beliefs and their social behaviour). On the other hand, there are some challenges with using sacred texts as tools to enhance social research interviews: it requires special kinds of interviewers (interested in religious beliefs, and showing respect and tolerance to different faiths) and interviewees (familiar with the texts and willing to share their personal beliefs); the depth of the interaction carries the risk associated with sensitive discussions; there could be some possible apprehension on the side of the interviewees prior to the interview time; and it could pose high demand on the time and effort needed to design a study (in the selection of verses, for example).

7.1 Contribution to knowledge

This study contributes methodologically to social sciences research. The methodological contribution is three-fold.

Contribution to social sciences research methodology

1. A new tool to be added to the interview-enhancing toolbox

Based on this study, sacred texts can be added to the social sciences research methodology toolbox along with photos, videos, vignettes, and other enhancing tools. The study has shown that short excerpts from books considered to be sacred by interviewees can be used fruitfully to enhance the dynamics and content of social research interviews.

The dual nature of sacred texts (universal – in that they exist beyond cultural boundaries, and personal – in that they can be subscribed to individually) provides what researchers have been aspiring to find, namely: 'an emic way of being etic' (Smith and Bond, 1993: 74) (i.e. a local way of being global), especially in the study of societies different to the researchers' or in studying more than one society in the same research.

The practice of building a social research interview around authentic texts is believed, based on this study, to provide the needed ecological validity (Bryman, 2016) (the confidence that the interaction taking place in the research interview is not removed from real-life interactions). This can also help fulfil a research desire expressed by Mishler (1991) for research interview settings that are not too formal to resemble real-life interactions.

2. A new approach in recruiting and studying participants based on their religious affiliation

It has been argued in this study that studying individuals in a society based on their religious affiliations can be more accurate than categorising them based on their nationalities, place of birth, age, or other categories. The theoretical reasons have been discussed in detail in section 2.2.2, and from a practical viewpoint, it is easier to recruit if the only criterion is the affiliation to a certain religion; in this case typicality of the population is more or less established. Participants in this case can even access their own favourite version/translation of the verses used if they are given the reference in their holy book.

This is not to replace considering participants' nationalities and other demographic data; it is, rather, a useful addition that can benefit research by giving some depth to the description of interview participants. This can help 'create complex and vivid tapestries' to a social research study (Ivanova, 2017[2]).

[2] Ivanova, M. (2017) E-mail to Maged Zakher, 28 June.

3. A new strategy in social research interviews

While most enhanced interviews use (sometimes creative) tools to enhance a discussion about a theme (or themes) defined by the researchers *a priori*, this study points at the possibility to embark on researching individuals of interest without *a priori* theme or topic that the researchers want to investigate. Rather, a tool is the focus in the interview, and because the tool does not have only one theme, it carries the flexibility and leeway for interviewees to spin their own worlds.

In this case, instead of deciding on a notion that the researcher wants to investigate, the researcher can explore what a group of people he or she is interested in (refugees, student mothers, early career researchers, residents in a certain neighbourhood, counsellors, etc.) have to say when interviewed by a prompt (such as sacred texts or other prompts of personal relevance to the individual participants). In this case, the prompt is not secondary to an *a priori* theme of interest to the researchers. This is similar to going back one step (from an interview schedule to an interview guide) giving more freedom for new themes to emerge in the interview; themes to which the researcher may be blind if he or she comes to the interview with specific notions to investigate.

Some caution needs to be exercised if the observations from using sacred texts to enhance social research interviews are extrapolated and transferred to other text-based tools. However, it can be argued that there is no reason to exclude texts that may not be technically sacred or religious, but are perhaps ‘religiously’ read, followed, and loved. An example could be the Harry Potter series and similar texts that can be considered by fans to be in a way ‘sacred’. It can be argued that a discussion in an interview setting with a Harry Potter fan may exhibit similar strategies to those strategies observed in this study (by, for example, quoting other parts of the series, reflecting on some emotional reactions to certain sections, or remembering some memories around reading some of the books).

If such a strategy is to be used, future researchers may make use of the amended definition of an enhanced interview if they need to assess the enhancing abilities of their new tools:

> An enhanced interview aims at a flowing conversation that can produce rich and varied data, and, therefore, can be defined as an interview that starts as an interviewee-centred interviewee-empowering dialogue contextualised in interviewee-relevant themes and progresses to include an equally interested and fully engaged interviewer.

References

Abell, J. and Myers, G. (2008) 'Analyzing research interviews', in Wodak, R. and Krzyżanowski, M. (eds.). *Qualitative Discourse Analysis in the Social Sciences.* London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 145-161.

Abu-Rabia, S. (1999) 'The effect of Arabic vowels on the reading comprehension of second- and sixth-grade native Arab children', *Journal of Psycholinguistic Research*, 28(1), pp. 93-101.

Adler, N. (1983) 'A typology of management studies involving culture', *Journal of International Business Studies*, 14(2), pp.29-47.

Alaszewski, A. (2006) *Using Diaries for Social Research*. London: Sage.

Al-Hilali, T. and Khan, M. (1996) *The Noble Quran: English Translation of the Meanings and Commentary.* Madinah: King Fahd Complex for the Printing of the Holy Quran.

Ali, A. (2015) *Heretic*. New York: Harper Collins.

Allen, Q. (2012) 'Photographs and stories: ethics, benefits and dilemmas of using participant photography with Black middle-class male youth', *Qualitative Research*, 12(4), pp. 443-58.

Alonso, A. and Koreck, M. T. (1989) 'Silences: Hispanics, AIDS, and sexual practices', *Differences*, 1, pp. 101-124.

Arksey, H. and Knight, P. (1999) *Interviewing for Social Scientists*. London: Sage.

Barnwell, K. (2002) *Bible Translation: An introductory course in translation principles.* 4th edn. Dallas: SIL Publications.

Barrett, J. L. (1996) 'Anthropomorphism, intentional agents, and conceptualizing God', unpublished PhD dissertation, Ithaca, NY: Cornwell University.

Barter, C. and Renold, E. (1999) 'The use of vignettes in qualitative research', *Social Research Update.* Available at: http://sru.soc.surrey.ac.uk/SRU25.html (Accessed: 20 July 2017).

Baskerville, R. F. (2003) 'Hofstede never studied culture', *Accounting, Organizations and Society*, 28(1), 1-14.

Bell, R. (1993) *Translation and Translating: Theory and Practice.* London: Longman.

Beltz, B. (2006) *Real Christianity*. Minnesota: Bethany House Publishers.

Berg, B. L. and Lune, H. (2014) *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences.* Essex: Pearson Education.

Binks, E. and Ferguson, N. (2014) 'Identities in diaspora: Social, national and political identities of the Irish and Northern Irish in England', *Contemporary Social Science,* 9(3), pp. 298-310.

Boyer, P. (2002) *Religion Explained: The Human Instincts that Fashion Gods, Spirits and Ancestors*. London: Vintage.

Bradbury-Jones, C., Taylor, J. and Herber, O. (2014) 'Vignette development and administration: a framework for protecting research participants', *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 17(4), pp. 427-40.

Bradby, H. (2002) 'Translating culture and language: A research note on multilingual settings', *Sociology of Health and Illness*, 24(6), pp. 842-855.

Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2006) 'Using thematic analysis in psychology', *Qualitative Research in Psychology,* 3(2), pp. 77-101.

Brislin, R. W. (1986) 'The wording and translation of research instruments', in Lonner, W. J. and Berry, J. W. (eds.) *Field Methods in Cross-cultural Research*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, pp. 137-164.

Brown, L. and Osman, H. (2017) 'The female tourist experience in Egypt as an Islamic destination', *Annals of Tourism Research,* 63, pp. 12-22.

Bryman, A. (2016) *Social Research Methods.* 5th edn. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Buckingham, D. (2009) '"Creative" visual methods in media research: Possibilities, problems and proposal', *Media, Culture & Society,* 31(4), pp. 633-652.

Burr, V. (1999) 'The extra-discursive in social constructionism', in Nightingale, D. J. and Cromby, J. (eds.) *Social Constructionist Psychology: A critical analysis of theory and practice*. Buckingham: Open University Press, pp. 113-126.

Burr, V. (2001) *An Introduction to Social Constructionism.* London: Taylor and Francis.

Burrell, G. and Morgan, G. (2005) *Sociological Paradigms and Organisational Analysis: Elements of the Sociology of Corporate Life.* England: Ashgate.

Cherrington, J. and Watson, B. (2010) 'Shooting a diary, not just a hoop: using video diaries to explore the embodied everyday contexts of a university basketball team', *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, 2(2), pp. 267-81.

Chew-Graham, C. A., May, C. R. and Perry, M. S. (2002) 'Qualitative research and the problem of judgement: Lessons from interviewing fellow professionals', *Family Practice*, 19, pp. 285-289.

Cicourel, A. V. (1982) 'Interviews, Surveys, and the Problem of Ecological Validity', *American Sociologist,* 17, pp. 11-20.

Clark, B. (2013) *Relevance Theory*. United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.

Cornes, A. (2004) *Cultures from the Inside Out: Travel – and Meet Yourself.* London: Intercultural Press.

Dana, N. F., Dana, T. M., Kelsay, K. L., Thomas, D. and Tippins, D. J. (1992), 'Qualitative interviewing and the art of questioning: Promises, possibilities, problems and pitfalls' Qualitative Research in Education Conference, Athens, GA, January 1992, Education Resources Information Center. Available at: https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED349308 (Accessed: 18 July 2017).

Davies, D. and Dodd, J. (2002) 'Qualitative research and the question of rigor', *Qualitative Health Research,* 12(2), pp. 279-289.

Davies, S. and Bourke, L. (2017) 'Crossing over cultures: Using visual methods in a cross-cultural context for teaching and research' in Watt, S. and Wakefield, C. (eds.) *Teaching Visual Methods in the Social Sciences.* Oxon: Routledge, pp. 162-181.

Denzin, N. K. (1978) *The Research Act: A Theoretical Introduction to Sociological Methods*. Chicago: Aldine.

Douglas, J. D. (1985) *Creative Interviewing.* London: Sage.

Dyregrov, K. (2004) 'Bereaved parents' experience of research participation', *Social Scientific Medicine*, 58(2), pp. 391-400.

Eggins, S. and Slade, D. (2004) *Analysing Casual Conversation.* London: Equinox.

Eltahawy, M. (2015) *Headscarves and Hymens.* London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson.

Evans, J. and Jones, P. (2011) 'The walking interview: methodology, mobility and place', *Applied Geography*, 31(2), pp. 849-58.

Ezzy, D. (2010) 'Qualitative interviewing as an embodied emotional performance', *Qualitative Inquiry,* 16(3), pp. 163-170.

Ferraro, G. and Andreatta, S. (2014) *Cultural Anthropology: An Applied Perspective.* 10th edn. United Stated of America: Cengage Learning.

Finch, H., Lewis, J. and Turley, C. (2014) 'Focus groups', in Ritchie, J., Lewis, J., McNaughton Nichols, C. and Ormston, R. (eds.) *Qualitative Research Practice: a guide for social science students & researchers.* 2nd edn. London: Sage, pp. 211-242.

Finlay, L. (2002) '"Outing" the researcher: The provenance, process, and practice of reflexivity', *Qualitative Health Research,* 12(4), pp. 531-545.

Fitzgerald, P. (2016) *Valuing the Visual: The case of Professional Ballet Dancers* [Lecture: Qualitative Methods in Action], Birkbeck, University of London. 10 May.

Ford, D. F. (2006) 'An interfaith wisdom: Scriptural reasoning between Jews, Christians and Muslims', *Modern Theology,* 22(3), pp. 345-366.

Forster, E. M. (2005) *Aspects of the Novel.* England: Penguin.

Francis, J. J., Johnston, M., Robertson, C., Glidewell, L., Entwistle, V., Eccles, M. P. and Grimshaw, J. M. (2009) 'What is an adequate sample size? Operationalising data saturation for theory-based interview studies', *Psychology and Health*, 25(10), pp. 1229-1245.

Gabriel, Y. and Connell, N. A. D. (Con) (2010) 'Co-creating stories: Collaborative experiments in storytelling', *Management Learning,* 41(5), pp. 507-523.

Gadami, M. (2012) 'The role of Islam in the tourism industry', *Management Arts*, 52, pp. 11204-11209.

Geertz, C. (1993) *The Interpretation of Cultures.* London: Fontana.

Geiger, A. (2017) *5 facts on how Americans view the Bible and other religious texts.* Pew Research [online]. Available at: http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/04/14/5-facts-on-how-americans-view-the-bible-and-other-religious-texts/ (Accessed 12 March 2018).

Gemignani, M. (2011) 'Between researcher and researched: an introduction to counter-transference in qualitative inquiry', *Qualitative Inquiry,* 17, pp. 710-708.

Glenn, P. (2003) *Laughter in Interaction.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Gobo, G. (2011) 'Globalizing methodology? The encounter between local methodologies', *International Journal of Social Research Methodologies,* 14(6), pp. 417-437.

Goleman, D. (1996) *Emotional Intelligence: Why it can matter more than IQ.* London: Bloomsbury.

Goodenough, W. (1970) *Description and Comparison in Cultural Anthropology.* Chicago: Aldine.

Gubrium, J. F. and Holstein, J. A. (2002) *Handbook of Interview Research: Context and Method.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Hall, E. T. (1973) *The Silent Language*. Garden City, New York: Anchor/Doubleday.

Hall, E. T. (1989) *Beyond Culture*. New York: Anchor/Doubleday.

Halliday, M. A. K. and Matthiessen, C. (2004) *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*. 3rd edn. London: Edward Arnold.

Hanna, P. (2012) 'Using internet technologies (such as Skype) as a research medium: a research note', *Qualitative Research,* 12(2), pp. 239-242.

Harper, D. (2002) 'Talking about pictures: A case for photo elicitation', *Visual Studies*, 17(1), pp. 13-26.

Harris, M. (1976) 'History and significance of the emic/etic distinction', *Annual Review of Anthropology,* 5, pp. 329-350.

Heller, M. (ed.) (1988) *Codeswitching: Anthropological and Sociolinguistic Perspectives.* Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Hermanowicz, J. C. (2002) 'The great interview: 25 strategies for studying people in bed', *Qualitative Sociology,* 25(4), pp. 479-499.

Hewitt, J. (2007) 'Ethical components of researcher-researched relationships in qualitative interviewing', *Qualitative Health Research*, 17(8), pp.1149-1159.

Hinnenkamp, V. (1987) 'Foreigner talk, code-switching and the concept of trouble', in Knapp, K., Enninger, W. and Knapp-Potthoff, A. (eds.) *Analyzing Intercultural Communication*. Berlin and New York: Mouton de Gruyter, pp. 137-80.

Hoffmann, E. A. (2007) 'Open-ended interviews, power, and emotional labor', *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography,* 36(3), pp. 318-346.

Hofstede, G. (1998) 'A Case for Comparing Apples with Oranges', *International Journal of Comparative Sociology*, 39(1), pp. 16-31.

Hofstede, G. and Hofstede, J. (2005) *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind.* 2nd edn. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Hollway, W. and Jefferson, T. (2000) *Doing Qualitative Research Differently: Free association, narrative and the interview method.* London: Sage.

Holstein, J. A. and Gubrium, J. F. (1995) *The Active Interview*. London: Sage.

Holt, D. B. (1991) 'Rashomon Visits Consumer Behavior: an Interpretive Critique of Naturalistic Inquiry', *Advances in Consumer Research,* 18, pp. 57-62.

Hubbard, G., Backett-Milburn, K. and Kemmer, D. (2001) 'Working with emotion: issues for the researcher in fieldwork and teamwork', *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 4(2), pp. 119-37.

Jary, M. (1998) 'Relevance theory and the communication of politeness', *Journal of Pragmatics*, 30, pp. 1-19.

Jenkins, N., Bloor, M., Fischer, J., Berney, L. and Neale, J. (2010) 'Putting it in context: The use of vignettes in qualitative interviewing', *Qualitative Research,* 10(2), pp. 175-198.

Jones, I., Brown, L. and Holloway, I. (2013) *Qualitative Research in Sport and Physical Activity.* London: Sage.

Kaniki, A. (2006) 'Doing an information search', in Terre Blanche, M., Durrheim, K. and Painter, D. (eds) *Research in practice: applied methods for the social sciences.* Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press, pp. 18-32.

Kara, H. (2015) *Creative Research Methods in the Social Sciences: A practical guide.* Bristol: Policy Press.

Kelemen, M. and Moffat, S. (2017) *Arts Based Methodologies* [Lecture], *Creative Research Methods Summer School*. Keele University. 6 July.

Kleinman, S. and Copp, M. A. (1993) *Emotions and Fieldwork.* Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Kvale, S. (1996) *InterViews: An Introduction to Qualitative Research Interviewing.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Kvale, S. and Brinkmann, S. (2009) *InterViews: Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research Interviewing.* 2nd edn. London: Sage.

Lapadat, J. C. and Lindsay, A. C. (1999) 'Transcription in Research and Practice: From Standardization of Technique to Interpretive Positionings', *Qualitative Inquiry,* 5(1), pp. 64-86.

Lever, J. (1981) 'Multiple methods of data collection: A note on divergence', *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography,* 10(2), pp. 199-213.

Lewis, J. and McNaughton Nicholls, C. (2014) 'Design issues', in Ritchie, J., Lewis, J., McNaughton Nichols, C. and Ormston, R. (eds.) *Qualitative Research Practice: a*

guide for social science students & researchers. 2nd edn. London: Sage, pp. 47-76.

Lincoln, Y. S. and Guba, E. G. (1985) *Naturalistic Inquiry*. London: Sage.

Lofland, J. (1971) *Analyzing Social Settings.* Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Lu, Y. and Gatua, M. W. (2014) 'Methodological Considerations for Qualitative Research with Immigrant Populations: Lessons from Two Studies', *The Qualitative Report,* 19(30), pp. 1-16.

Maier, C. (1995) 'Toward a theoretical practice for cross-cultural translation', in Dingwaney, A. and Maier, C. (eds.) *Between Languages and Cultures. Translation and Cross-cultural Contexts.* Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, pp. 21-38.

Mannay, D. (2010) 'Making the familiar strange: Can visual research methods render the familiar setting more perceptible?', *Qualitative Research* 10(1), pp. 91-111.

Martin, W. and Pilcher, K. (2015) *Photographing Everyday Life: Ageing, Lived Experiences, Time and Space* [Lecture], *Methods on the Move: Advanced postgraduate research methods school*. Open University. 12 November.

Mason, J. (2002) 'Qualitative interviewing: Asking, listening, interpreting', in May, T. (ed.) *Qualitative Research in Action.* London: Sage, pp. 225-241.

Matsui, T. (1998) 'Assessing a scenario-based account of bridging reference assignment', in Carston, R. and Uchida, S. (eds.) *Relevance Theory: Applications and Implications.* Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, pp. 123-160.

Maykut, P. and Morehouse, R. (1994) *Beginning Qualitative Research: A Philosophic and Practical Guide.* London: Falmer.

McAdams, D. P. and McLean, K. C. (2013) 'Narrative Identity', *Current Directions in Psychological Science,* 22(3), pp. 233-238.

McHugh, A. S. (2015) *The Listening Life: Embracing attentiveness in a world of distraction.* Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books.

McSweeney, B. (2002a) 'Hofstede's model of national cultural differences and their consequences: a triumph of faith – a failure of analysis', *Human Relations*, 55(1), 89-118.

Messick, B. (2003) 'Notes on transliteration', in Rubel, P. G. and Rosman, A. (eds.) *Translating Cultures: Perspectives on Translation and Anthropology.* Oxford: Berg, pp. 177-96.

Miles, M. B. and Huberman, A. M. (1994) *Qualitative Data Analysis: A new sourcebook of methods.* Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Miller, J. (1983) *Many Voices: Bilingualism, Culture and Education.* London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Miller, J. and Glassner, B. (2011) 'The "inside" and "outside": findings realities in interviews', in Silverman, D. (ed.) *Qualitative Research*, London: Sage, pp. 131-148.

Mishler, E. G. (1991) *Research Interviewing: Context and Narrative.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Morse, J. M., Barrett, M., Mayan, M., Olson, K., and Spiers, J. (2002) 'Verification strategies for establishing reliability and validity in qualitative research', *International Journal of Qualitative Methods,* 1(2). Available at: https://sites.ualberta.ca/~iiqm/backissues/1_2Final/pdf/morseetal.pdf (Accessed: 26 July 2017).

Myers, M. D. and Tan, F. (2002) 'Beyond models of national culture in information systems research', *Journal of Global Information Management*, 10(1), 24-32.

NCRMUK (2015) *Creative Research Methods, Dr. Helen Kara.* Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7PgWTVL92RM (Accessed: 12 March 2018).

Neave, P. (2016) *The unexpected challenges of a country's first election*. TED [Online]. Available at: https://www.ted.com/talks/philippa_neave_the_unexpected_challenges_of_a_country_s_first_election?language=en (Accessed: 12 March 2018).

Nunkoosing, K. (2005) 'The problems with interviews', *Qualitative Health Research,* 15(5), pp. 698-706.

Oliver, P. (2003) *The Student's Guide to Research Ethics.* Maidenhead; Philadelphia: Open University Press.

Oppenheim, A. N. (1992) *Questionnaire Design, Interviewing and Attitude Measurement.* London: Printer Publishers.

Ormston, R., Spencer, L., Barnard, M. and Snape, D. (2014) 'The foundations of qualitative research', in Ritchie, J., Lewis, J., McNaughton Nichols, C. and Ormston, R. (eds.) *Qualitative Research Practice: a guide for social science students & researchers.* 2nd edn. London: Sage, pp. 1-25.

Orne, M. T. (1962) 'On the social psychology of the psychology experiment: with particular reference to demand characteristics and their implications', *American Psychologist*, 17, pp. 776-783.

Otsuji, E. (2010) '"Where Am I From": Performative and "Metro" Perspectives of Origin', in Nunan, D. and Choi, J. (eds.) *Language and Culture: Reflective Narratives and the Emergence of Identities.* London: Routledge, pp. 186-193.

Paltridge, B. (2012) *Discourse Analysis.* London: Bloomsbury.

Peng, H. (2010) *Chinese PhD Thesis Acknowledgments: A communities of practice perspective*. Bern: Peter Lang.

Pike, K. L. (1967) *Language in Relation to a Unified Theory of the Structure of Human Behavior.* 2nd edn. Paris: Mouton & Co.

Piller, I. (2011) *Intercultural Communication: A Critical Introduction.* Great Britain: Edinburgh University Press.

Powell, K. (2010) 'Making sense of place: Mapping as a multisensory research method', *Qualitative Inquiry,* 16(7), pp. 539-555.

Rahman, S. (2004) *BBC 2 Spring Primary RE Pathways of Belief: The Bible & the Koran:* Director Lubna Malik, 6 February.

Richards, J. C. and Rodgers, T. S. (2014) *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching.* 3rd edn. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Rose, G. (2012) *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to Researching with Visual Materials.* 3rd edn. London: Sage.

Rosenwald, G. C. (1985) 'Hypocrisy, self-deception, and perplexity: The subject's enhancement as methodological criterion', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology,* 49(3), pp. 682-703.

Roulston, K. (2010) *Reflective Interviewing: A guide to theory and practice.* London: Sage.

Roulston, K., deMarris, K. and Lewis, J. B. (2003) 'Learning to interview in the social sciences', *Qualitative Inquiry,* 9(4), pp. 643-668.

Rubin, H. J. and Rubin, I. S. (2012) *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data*. 3rd edn. London: Sage.

Ryan, F., Coughlan, M. and Cronin, P. (2009) 'Interviewing in qualitative research: The one-to-one interview', *International Journal of Therapy and Rehabilitation*, 16(6), pp. 309-314.

SAGE (2009) *Donna Mertens on Research Methods.* Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8_AMAbK7wcU (Accessed: 12 March 2018).

Sangha, J., Slade, B., Mirchandani, K., Maitra, S. and Shan, H. (2012) 'An ethnodrama on work-related learning in precarious jobs: racialization and resistances', *Qualitative Inquiry*, 18(3), pp.286-296.

Schuman, H. (1982) 'Artifacts are in the mind of the beholder', *American Sociologist*, 17(1), pp. 21-28.

Schwartz, S. H. and Huismans, S. (1995) 'Value Priorities and Religiosity in Four Western Religions', *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 58(2), pp. 88-107.

Shenton, A. K. (2004) 'Strategies for ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research projects', *Education for Information,* 22(2), pp. 63-75.

Shordike, A., Hocking, C., Pierce, D., Wright-St Clair, V., Vittayakorn, S., Rattakorn, P. and Bunrayong, W. (2010) 'Respecting regional culture in an international multi-site study: a derived etic method', *Qualitative Research*, 10(3), pp. 333-55.

Silverman, D. (2001) *Interpreting Qualitative Data: Methods for Analyzing Talk, Text and Interaction.* 2nd edn. London: Sage.

Smart, N. (1979) *The Philosophy of Religion: Studies in Philosophy and Religion.* London: Sheldon Press.

Smith, E., Gidlow, B. and Steel, G. (2012) 'Engaging adolescent participants in academic research: the use of photo-elicitation interviews to evaluate school-based outdoor education programmes', *Qualitative Research*, 12(4), pp. 367-87.

Smith, J. A. and Osborn, M. (2008) ‘Interpretative phenomenological analysis’, in Smith, J. A. (ed) *Qualitative Psychology: A practical guide to research methods.* London: Sage, pp. 53-80.

Smith, P. B. and Bond, M. H. (1993) *Social Psychology across Cultures: Analysis and Perspectives.* New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf.

Smith, S., Fisher, S. and Heath, A. (2011) ‘Opportunities and challenges in the expansion of cross-national survey research’, *International Journal of Social Research Methodology,* 14(6), pp. 485-502.

Spencer-Oatey, H. and Franklin, P. (2009) *Intercultural Interaction: A Multidisciplinary Approach to Intercultural Communication.* Hampshire: Palgrave MacMillan.

Sperber, D. (1996) *Explaining Culture: A Naturalistic Approach.* Oxford: Blackwell.

Sperber, D. and Wilson, D. (1998) ‘Irony and relevance: A reply to Seto, Hamamoto and Yamanshi’, in Carston, R. and Uchida, S. (eds.) *Relevance Theory: Applications and Implications.* Philadelphia: John Benjamins, pp. 283-294.

Sperber, D. and Wilson, D. (2004) *Relevance: Communication and Cognition.* 2nd edn. Oxford: Blackwell.

Sullivan, W. and Rees, J. (2011) *Clean Language: Revealing Metaphors and Opening Minds*. Wales: Crown House.

Swann, J. (2006) ‘The art of the everyday’, in Maybin, J. and Swann, J. (eds.) *The Art of English: Everyday Activity,* Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 3-53.

Tarakeshwar, N., Stanton, J. and Pargament, K. I. (2003) 'Religion: An overlooked dimension in cross-cultural psychology', *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 34(4), pp. 377-94.

TED (2016) *Art can heal PTSD's invisible wounds | Melissa Walker*. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qs9m8obl0AY (Accessed: 12 March 2018).

The Holy Bible (NIV) (2011). *The Holy Bible*. Colorado Springs, CO: Biblica.

The Word for the World (2017) *Training*. Available at: http://www.twftw.org/training/ (Accessed: 15 July 2017).

Trompenaars, F. and Hampden-Turner, C. (2007) *Riding the Waves of Culture*: *Understanding Cultural Diversity in Business* 2nd ed. London: Nicholas Brealey.

Tyndale, W. (2003) 'Idealism and Practicality: The role of religion in development', *Development*, 46(4), pp. 22-28.

Walliman, N. (2005) *Your Research Project.* 2nd edn. London: Sage.

Weber, E. U., Hsee, C. K. and Sokolowska, J. (1998) 'What folklore tells us about risk and risk taking: Cross-cultural comparisons of American, German, and Chinese proverbs', *Organizational Behavior and Human Processes,* 75(2), pp. 170-186.

Webster, S., Lewis, J. and Brown, A. (2014) 'Ethical considerations in qualitative research', in Ritchie, J., Lewis, J., McNaughton Nichols, C. and Ormston, R. (eds.) *Qualitative Research Practice: a guide for social science students & researchers.* 2nd edn. London: Sage, pp. 77-110.

Weiner, I. B. (2003) *Principles of Rorschach Interpretation,* 2nd edn. London: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Welch, C. and Piekkari, R. (2006) 'Crossing language boundaries: Qualitative interviewing in international business', *Management International Review*, 46(4), pp. 417-437.

Wellington, J. and Szczerbinski, M. (2007) *Research Methods for the Social Sciences*. London: Continuum.

Whiting, R. (2016) *Participatory Video Diaries: Digital Brain Switch video study*. [Lecture: Qualitative Methods in Action], Birkbeck, University of London. 10 May.

Whorf, B. L. (1997) 'The relation of habitual thought and behaviour to language', in Coupland, N. and Jaworski, A. (eds) *Sociolinguistics, Modern Linguistics Series.* London: Palgrave, pp. 443-463.

Williamson, D. (2002) 'Forward from a critique of Hofstede's model of national culture', *Human Relations*, 55(1), pp. 1373-1395.

Wilson, D. and Sperber, D. (1998) 'Pragmatics and time', in Carston, R. and Uchida, S. (eds.) *Relevance Theory: Applications and Implications.* Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins, pp. 1-22.

Wong, J. P. and Poon, M. K. (2010) 'Bringing translation out of the shadows: Translation as an issue of methodological significance in cross-cultural qualitative research', *Journal of Transcultural Nursing,* 21(2), pp. 151-158.

Wycliffe Bible Translators (2017) *FAQ: How long does it take to translate a New Testament?* Available at: https://www.wycliffe.org.uk/about/faq/ (Accessed: 15 July 2017).

Yeo, A., Legard, R., Keegan, J., Ward, K., McNaughton Nicholls, C. and Lewis, J. (2014) 'In-depth interviews', in Ritchie, J., Lewis, J., McNaughton Nichols, C. and Ormston, R. (eds.) *Qualitative Research Practice: a guide for social science students & researchers.* 2nd edn. London: Sage, pp. 177-210.

Žegarac, V. (2007) 'A cognitive pragmatic perspective on communication and culture', in Kotthof, H. and Spencer-Oatey, H. (eds.) *Handbook of Intercultural Communication.* Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, pp. 31-53.

Zimbardo, P. (2007) *The Lucifer Effect: How Good People Turn Evil.* Reading: CPI Cox&Wyman.

Appendices

Appendix I Extra Sets of Verses not used in this Research

For Christians:

Proverbs 3: 13 New International Version (NIV)

Blessed are those who find wisdom,
those who gain understanding

Ecclesiastes 1: 18 New International Version (NIV)

For with much wisdom comes much sorrow;
the more knowledge, the more grief.

For Muslims:

(Al-Baqarah 269)

and he, to whom *Hikmah* is granted, is indeed granted abundant good.

(Al-Ma'idah' 101)

O you who believe! Ask not about things which, if made plain to you, may cause you trouble.

Appendix II Arabic Biblical Verses

(متَّى 5: 16)

فَلْيُضِئْ نُورُكُمْ هكَذَا قُدَّامَ النَّاسِ، لِكَيْ يَرَوْا أَعْمَالَكُمُ الْحَسَنَةَ، وَيُمَجِّدُوا أَبَاكُمُ الَّذِي فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ

(متَّى 6: 3)

وَأَمَّا أَنْتَ فَمَتَى صَنَعْتَ صَدَقَةً فَلاَ تُعَرِّفْ شِمَالُكَ مَا تَفْعَلُ يَمِينُكَ

(خروج 20: 12)

أكرِمْ أباكَ وأُمَّكَ لكَيْ تَطولَ أَيّامُكَ علَى الأرضِ الَّتِي يُعْطِيكَ الرَّبُّ إِلهُكَ

(متَّى 10: 37)

مَنْ أَحَبَّ أَبًا أَوْ أُمًّا أَكْثَرَ مِنِّي فَلاَ يَسْتَحِقُّنِي ، ومن أحب ابنا أو ابنة أكثر مني فلا يستحقني

(مزمور 8: 4، 5)

فَمَنْ هُوَ الإِنْسَانُ حَتَّى تَذْكُرَهُ؟ وَابْنُ آدَمَ حَتَّى تَفْتَقِدَهُ؟
وَتَنْقُصَهُ قَلِيلاً عَنِ الْمَلاَئِكَةِ، وَبِمَجْدٍ وَبَهَاءٍ تُكَلِّلُهُ

(يعقوب 4: 14)

لأَنَّهُ مَا هِيَ حَيَاتُكُمْ؟ إِنَّهَا بُخَارٌ، يَظْهَرُ قَلِيلاً ثُمَّ يَضْمَحِلُّ

Appendix III Arabic Quranic Verses

(الضحى 11)

وَأَمَّا بِنِعْمَةِ رَبِّكَ فَحَدِّثْ

(البقرة 271)

إِن تُبْدُوا الصَّدَقَاتِ فَنِعِمَّا هِيَ وَإِن تُخْفُوهَا وَتُؤْتُوهَا الْفُقَرَاءَ فَهُوَ خَيْرٌ لَّكُمْ

(الإسراء 23)

وَبِالْوَالِدَيْنِ إِحْسَانًا

(المجادلة 22)

لَا تَجِدُ قَوْمًا يُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ يُوَادُّونَ مَنْ حَادَّ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ وَلَوْ كَانُوا آبَاءَهُمْ أَوْ أَبْنَاءَهُمْ أَوْ إِخْوَانَهُمْ أَوْ عَشِيرَتَهُمْ

(الإسراء 70)

وَلَقَدْ كَرَّمْنَا بَنِي آدَمَ

(الأحزاب 72)

وَحَمَلَهَا الْإِنْسَانُ إِنَّهُ كَانَ ظَلُوماً جَهُولاً

Appendix IV Details of Interviewees' Demographics and Interviews' Medium and Duration

	Pseudonym	Age	Religion *	Gender **	Nationality	Interview Medium	Recruitment	Duration ***
1	Liz	51	C	F	British	Face-to-Face	University acquaintance	72
2	Margaret	30	C	F	British Cypriot	Face-to-Face	University acquaintance	76
3	Omar	42	M	M	British	Face-to-Face	University acquaintance	96
4	Adel	45	C	M	Egyptian	Face-to-Face	University acquaintance	38
5	Nancy	63	C	F	Irish	Face-to-Face	University acquaintance	75
6	Robert	63	C	M	British	Video via Skype	Referred by University acquaintance	54
7	Hassan	41	M	M	Egyptian	Face-to-Face	University acquaintance	85
8	Boules	19	C	M	Egyptian	Video via Skype	Via Facebook invitation	85
9	Youssef	34	C	M	Egyptian	Video via Skype	Via Facebook invitation	93
10	Mostapha	29	M	M	Egyptian	Video via JusTalk	Via Facebook invitation	82
11	Shenouda	22	C	M	Egyptian	Video via Messenger	Via Facebook invitation	72
12	Mohammad	23	M	M	Egyptian	Audio via Skype	Via Facebook invitation	85
13	Maryam	35	M	F	British	Face-to-Face	University acquaintance	92
14	Nardine	57	C	F	Egyptian	Video via Skype	Via Facebook invitation	91
15	Teresa	21	C	F	Half-British Half-Sicilian	Face-to-Face	University acquaintance	90
16	Feysal	30	M	M	Pakistani British	Face-to-Face	University acquaintance	105
17	Medhat	27	C	M	Egyptian	Video via Skype and Messenger	Via Facebook invitation	67
18	Mirium	30	M	F	Pakistani British	Face-to-Face audio recording	University acquaintance	81
19	Nabila	18	M	F	Pakistani British	Face-to-Face audio recording	University acquaintance	76
20	Hussein	35	M	M	Pakistani	Face-to-Face	University acquaintance	90
21	Rosaline	30	C	F	Indian	Face-to-Face	University acquaintance	84
22	Raheel	27	M	M	Pakistani	Face-to-Face	University acquaintance	99
23	Aya	36	M	F	Arab	Face-to-Face audio recording	University acquaintance	140
24	Talia	34	C	F	Rwandan	Face-to-Face audio recording	University acquaintance	74

25	Sarah	38	C	F	Egyptian	Face-to-Face audio recording	Referred by University acquaintance	79
26	Yasmine	18	M	F	Half-British Half-Pakistani/Bengali	Face-to-Face	Referred by a previous participant	58
27	Hind	30	M	F	Arab	Face-to-Face	University acquaintance	88
28	Kala	46	C	F	South-East Asian	Face-to-Face audio recording	University acquaintance	102
Average		34.7						83
Highest		63						140
Lowest		18						38
TOTAL								2329

*Religion: C = Christian, M = Muslim

**Gender: F = Female, M = Male

***Duration in minutes

Appendix V Information Sheet

Business and Management Research Institute

PhD Cross-cultural Research Project

Information Sheet

You are invited to participate in a research project. Please read the following carefully and make sure you understand what is required before you agree to participate.

In this study I am investigating how the British and Egyptians are similar / different in some cultural aspects, and I invite you to participate with your personal views.

Participation is entirely voluntary. You can decide to withdraw at any time for any reasons.

You are invited to attend a one-to-one interview (face-to-face or via Skype) that will be video recorded and lasts for a maximum of 90 minutes at a time convenient to you. You will be asked questions about some religious verses (from the Bible or the Qur'an) and you are expected to express your opinions and how you understand each verse. You may choose to omit or refrain from answering any questions for any reasons.

All data will be kept anonymous (no participants can be traced or identified in the written study). No real names will be used.

Data will be accessed by only the researcher and supervisory team and will only be used for this research purpose. All video materials will be destroyed upon my receipt of the degree.

If you agree to help, put your initials on the accompanying Consent Form. You will be contacted to arrange for an interview at a time convenient to you.

This research will lead to a dissertation that is part of my PhD at the Business and Management Research Institute, University of Bedfordshire. My supervisor is Dr. Vladimir Zegarac whom you may contact if you have any questions about this research at vladimir.zegarac@beds.ac.uk

If you have any enquiries, you may contact me at maged.zakher@study.beds.ac.uk

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet.

Maged Zakher, 6 November 2014

Appendix VI Information Sheet – Arabic

University of Bedfordshire

Business and Management Research Institute

بحث في الثقافات لدرجة الدكتوراة

معلومات عن البحث

أدعوك إلى المشاركة في مشروع هذا البحث. فضلًا، اقرأ التالي جيدًا، وتأكد من فهمك للمطلوب قبل أن توافق على المشاركة.

في هذه الدراسة، أبحث عن أوجه التشابه والاختلاف ما بين المصريين والبريطانيين فيما يختص ببعض النواحي الثقافية، وأدعوك إلى المشاركة بآرائك الشخصية.

الاشتراك في هذا البحث تطوعيٌّ بالكامل، ويمكنك أن تقرر الانسحاب في أي وقت ولأي سبب.

أدعوك إلى الاشتراك في مقابلة شخصية (وجهًا لوجه أو عبر برنامج Skype) وستُسجَّل هذه المقابلة الشخصية بالفيديو وستستغرق 90 دقيقة كحد أقصى وستتم في وقت مناسب لك. سأسألك أسئلة عن بعض الآيات الدينية (من الكتاب المقدس أو القرآن) وأتوقع منك أن تعبر عن آرائك وعن كيفية فهمك لكل آية. لديك كامل الحرية لحذف أو الامتناع عن إجابة أي سؤال لأي سبب لديك.

لن يتم ربْط البيانات بشكل يعبر عن هويتك الشخصية (بمعنى أن الدراسة المكتوبة لن تشير بالاسم إلى أي من المشاركين بما يمكِّن من تتبُّع هويتهم). لن تُستخدم أسماء حقيقية في البحث.

سيتم الإطلاع على البيانات فقط من قِبل الباحث وفريق الإشراف، وستُستخدم فقط في أغراض هذا البحث. سيتم التخلُّص من كل المواد الفيلمية المسجلة عند حصولي على الدرجة العلمية.

إذا وافقت على المساعدة، ضع الحروف الأولى من اسمك على ورقة الموافقة المرافِقة لهذه المعلومات. سأتواصل معك لتحديد ميعاد مناسب لك للمقابلة الشخصية.

سيقود هذا البحث إلى رسالة علمية كجزء من درجة الدكتوراة التي أدرسها في المركز البحثي للأعمال والإدارة في جامعة بيدفوردشير بالمملكة المتحدة. المشرف على دراستي هو د. فلاديمير جيجاراتس والذي يمكنك التواصل معه إن كانت لديك أي تساؤلات بخصوص هذا البحث على البريد الإليكتروني vladimir.zegarac@beds.ac.uk

إن كانت لديك أي تساؤلات، يمكنك التواصل معي على maged.zakher@study.beds.ac.uk

أشكرك على قراءة هذه المعلومات.

ماجد زاخر، 6 نوفمبر 2014

Appendix VII Consent Form

Business and Management Research Institute

CONSENT FORM

Researcher: Maged Zakher

maged.zakher@study.beds.ac.uk

I have read and understand the accompanying information sheet and I agree to be included in this study. I know that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw my consent at any time. I agree to be video recorded in interview sessions (Face-to-face / via Skype). I also agree to be quoted anonymously in the report document(s).

_____ _____

Initials of Participant Date

_____ _____

Initials of Researcher Date

Appendix VIII Consent Form – Arabic

University of Bedfordshire

Business and Management Research Institute

ورقة موافقة

الباحث: ماجد زاخر

maged.zakher@study.beds.ac.uk

لقد قرأتُ ورقة المعلومات المصاحِبة، وأفهمها جيدًا، وأوافق أن أنضم إلى هذه الدراسة. أعلم أن اشتراكي تطوُّعي، وأعلم أن بإمكاني سحْب موافقتي في أي وقت. أوافق أن يتم التسجيل بالفيديو في جلسات المقابلة الشخصية (وجهًا لوجه أو عبْر برنامج Skype). وأوافق أيضًا أن تُستخدم إجاباتي في وثائق التقرير لهذه الدراسة بما لا يشير إلى شخصي بالاسم.

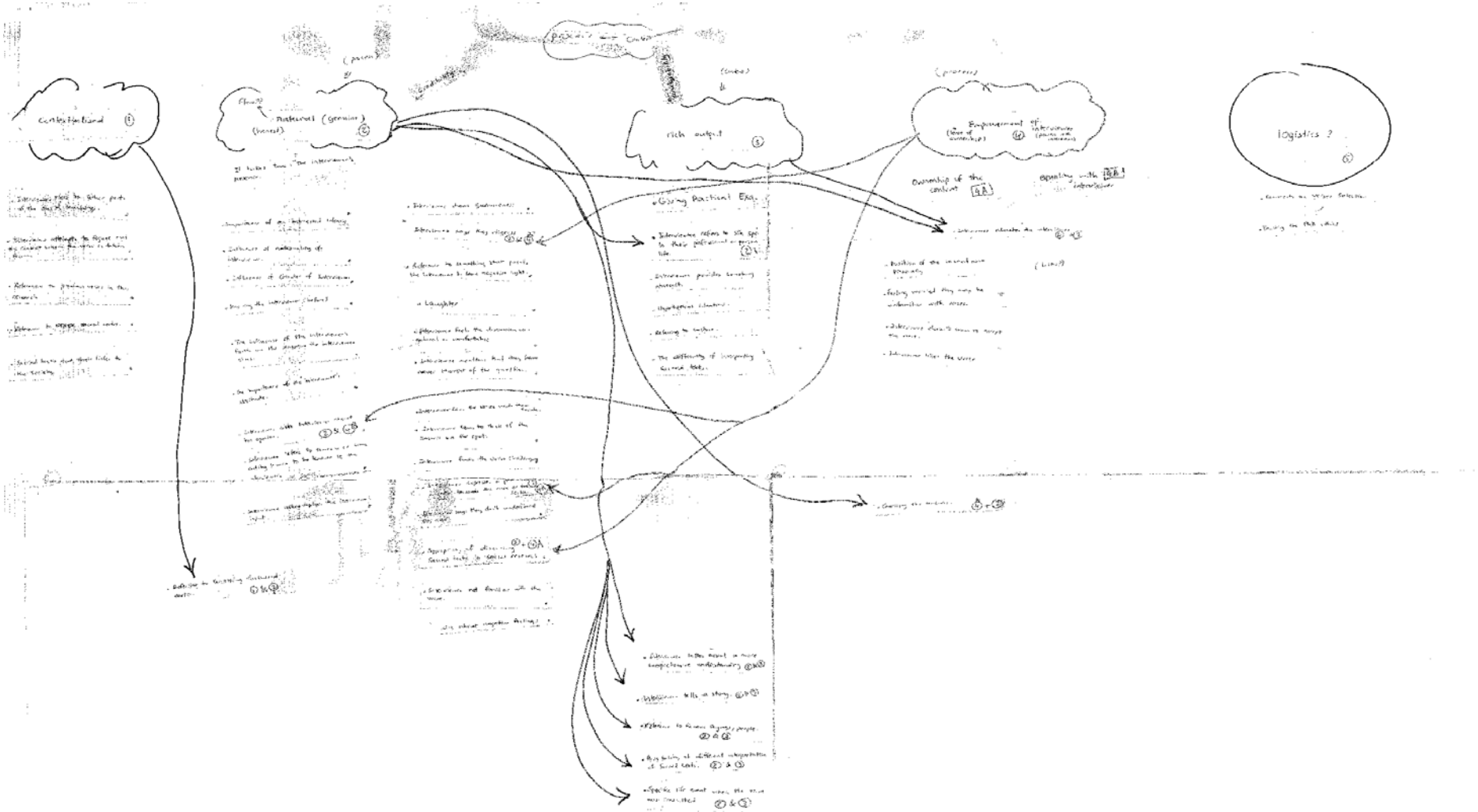
_____	_____
الحروف الأولى من اسم المشارك	**التاريخ**
_____	_____
الحروف الأولى من اسم الباحث	**التاريخ**

Appendix IX Codes used to Analyse the Video Material in NVivo 11

Code	Interviews	Instances
Appropriateness of discussing Sacred Texts in social research	22	77
Comments on Verses Selection	15	30
Feeling Worried they may be unfamiliar with Verses	7	10
Giving Practical Examples	25	224
Guessing the Answer	6	8
Hypothetical situations	18	32
Importance of an INTERESTED Interviewer	6	7
Influence of Gender of Interviewer	17	17
Influence of Nationality of Interviewer	11	11
Interviewee Acknowledges the input of Interviewer	18	44
Interviewee asks interviewer about his opinion	8	11
Interviewee attempts to figure the context where the verse is taken from	23	63
Interviewee doesn't seem to accept the verse	10	19
Interviewee educates the interviewer	13	26
Interviewee expresses a particular emotion towards the verse or the section	11	32
Interviewee feels the discussion was 'natural' or Comfortable	26	61
Interviewee finds the verse challenging	7	7
Interviewee LIKES the verse	3	4
Interviewee mentions that they have never thought of the question	6	7
Interviewee Not Familiar with the Verse	5	8
Interviewee provides something abstract	6	13
Interviewee refers to other parts of the Sacred Teachings	26	199
Interviewee refers to someone or some entity known to be known to the interviewer	17	44
Interviewee refers to something specific to their professional or personal lives	27	274
Interviewee says the verses made them think	4	4
Interviewee says they digress	7	9
Interviewee says they don't understand the verse	15	22
Interviewee seems to think of the answer on the spot	14	32
Interviewee shows GENUINENESS	13	22
Interviewee talks about a more comprehensive understanding	22	51
Interviewee tells a story	26	169
Knowing the Interviewer (before)	14	19
Laughter	19	50
Position of the Sacred Book Personally	27	81
Possibility of different interpretation of Sacred Texts	18	56
PROMPTING	1	2
Reference to OTHER Sacred codes	9	15
Reference to previous VERSES in this research	10	12
Reference to something that paints the interviewee in some negative light	17	51
Reference to Famous Sayings, People	8	15
Referring to 'culture'	19	72
Referring to something discussed earlier	22	45

Sacred Books and their links to the Society	8	15
Sense of AGENCY	2	2
Sense of PRIDE	1	3
Specific Life Event where the Verse was consulted	7	13
Talking about negative feelings	13	38
The Difficulty of Interpreting Sacred Texts	1	1
The Importance of the Interviewer's Attitude	18	42
The Influence of the interviewer's Faith on the answers the interviewee gives	24	42
Trusting the PhD Research Ethics	7	11

Appendix X Manual Categorisation of Codes – Version 1



Appendix XI Manual Categorisation of Codes – Version 2